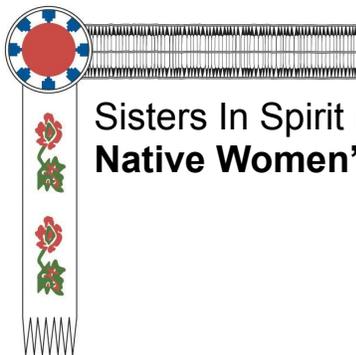


# Voices of Our Sisters In Spirit:

A Report to  
Families and Communities

2nd Edition  
March 2009



Sisters In Spirit is a research, education and policy initiative of the **Native Women's Association of Canada.**



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## Preface to the 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition

This is a second edition of *Voices of Our Sisters In Spirit*, originally published in November 2008.

The second edition includes new life stories of Debbie Sloss, Georgina Papin and Terrie Ann Dauphinais. The stories of Amber, Nina and Daleen include new messages, updates, photos and poems from their families. Tashina General and Tiffany Morrison are included as stolen and missing sisters and information has been added to Claudette Osborne's missing alerts, as well as Gladys Tolley's memorium.

Also, included in the second edition is an expanded research framework, updated research results as of March 31, 2009 and reports on communications and education highlights. We conclude with interim Sisters In Spirit trends and recommendations developed to address the serious levels of violence against Aboriginal women and girls in Canada.



## President's Acknowledgements

President Beverley Jacobs, on behalf of the Board of Directors and staff of the Native Women's Association of Canada, wishes to thank and honour the family members who are participating in the Sisters In Spirit initiative for their courage and generosity in sharing the stories of their daughters, sisters, mothers and grandmothers. Their vision, strength and commitment enable NWAC to move forward with this important work.

President Jacobs also extends thanks to all the individuals who have contributed their time, effort and knowledge to investigating the root causes, circumstances and trends associated with the issue of racialized, sexualized violence against Aboriginal women and girls. Their efforts to understand this issue and to identify strategies and measures that will increase the safety of Aboriginal women and girls in Canada are much appreciated.

President Jacobs acknowledges the guidance and advice of the Elders and other spiritual leaders who have assisted participating families, individuals and staff who have worked on this difficult initiative. She also thanks the Aboriginal communities for their support, and other stakeholders for their engagement in dealing with this issue.



## Introduction

The Sisters In Spirit initiative is a multi-year research, education and policy initiative funded by Status of Women Canada. The initiative is designed to address the disturbing numbers of missing and murdered Aboriginal women and girls in Canada. Through the Sisters In Spirit initiative, the Native Women's Association of Canada (NWAC) aims to better understand racialized, sexualized violence against Aboriginal women and girls. This knowledge assists NWAC and other stakeholders to understand the root causes of this violence and identify measures to increase the safety of Aboriginal women and girls. Through the Sisters In Spirit initiative, NWAC works to honour the women and girls who have been lost to violence and remember those still missing.

This *Report to Families and Communities* summarizes information gained through interviews with participating families about their missing or murdered loved ones, as well as demographic and statistical research. The interviews use a story telling methodology based on a life cycle approach to share the life stories of these Aboriginal women and girls. The investment of family members and NWAC staff in building authentic and sincere relationships adheres to the ethical requirements of conducting research in an Aboriginal context. In this report, the life stories are placed within the broader framework of other work conducted through the Sisters In Spirit initiative and serve to confirm conclusions based on other research, illustrate common themes, inform policy recommendations and identify future directions for further investigation. Addressed to family and community members, this report represents NWAC's commitment to sharing our work with those most intimately concerned with this important issue.



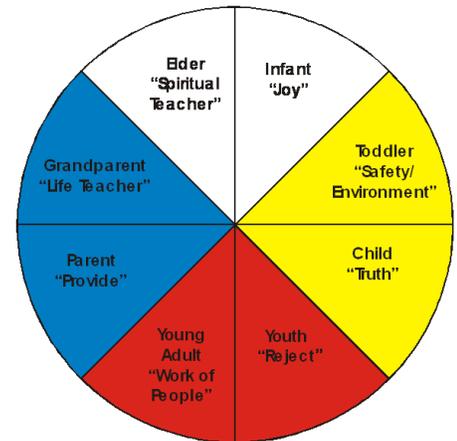
## Sisters In Spirit Community Based Research Framework

The Sisters In Spirit initiative seeks to reclaim traditional Aboriginal protocols, processes and understandings around ways of knowing and what it means to conduct research. NWAC has developed a community based research plan to guide our work in a culturally-appropriate and respectful way.<sup>1</sup> Our methodology<sup>2</sup> involves a collaborative, reciprocal process between equal partners. This relationship-based approach to research privileges the experiences of Aboriginal women, girls and their families, and allows for different cultures, values, traditions, needs and perspectives to be reflected in the stories families share. As we carry out this work, we are guided by the cultural and ethical values of caring, sharing, trust and strength.

As a research for change process, the Sisters In Spirit initiative is about more than ‘finding out’ about missing and murdered Aboriginal women and girls. Our research reflects a visionary philosophy in which families of missing and murdered Aboriginal women and girls and other stakeholders, such as community members and service providers, are asked to share their vision for the future. Sisters In Spirit research activities are designed to uncover root causes, circumstances and trends in order to promote policy change that will increase the personal safety and security of all Aboriginal women and girls in Canada.

Our research is guided by the following four questions:

1. What are the circumstances, root causes and trends leading to racialized, sexualized violence against Aboriginal women in Canada?
2. How has the justice system responded to family and community reports of missing and murdered Aboriginal women in Canada? What issues, challenges and gaps exist?
3. What changes need to be implemented in order to improve the safety and well-being of Aboriginal women in Canada, particularly related to this issue?
4. How can these changes be implemented in order to reduce or prevent racialized, sexualized violence against Aboriginal women, particularly that which results in their disappearance or death?



Life story telling is guided by the life cycle

It is important to note that in the context of this research initiative, the word ‘murder’ is used to refer to deaths resulting from homicide or negligence. NWAC also tracks cases of ‘suspicious death.’ ‘Suspicious death’ refers to incidents that police have declared natural or accidental, but that family or community members regard as suspicious.

Sisters In Spirit research is carried out using a combination of methods. Primary research<sup>3</sup> is gathered mainly through storytelling (interviews) with families of missing and murdered Aboriginal women and girls. Using the life cycle as a guide, families are invited to share the life story of their daughter, sister, mother or grandmother. These stories also explore the experiences of family members in relation to the justice system, the media, victim services and other supports. Other sources of primary research include key informant interviews, community workshops and focus groups.

In keeping with a relationship-based approach to research, the storytelling process is collaborative. Relationships build trust and trust is integral to the initiative. As researchers, our role is to create space for families to share their experiences, knowledge, thoughts and ideas in a good way. We remain mindful of issues surrounding confidentiality and acquire the informed consent of participating family members. While the interview process is semi-structured, families have control over the stories they share. The interview is followed by an ongoing dialogue; families are offered several opportunities to revise the story. Once the story has been published, NWAC continues to inform participating families as to the activities and progress of the Sisters In Spirit initiative.

NWAC understands and privileges the fact that the stories shared by family members are reflective of their life experiences and healing journeys, and we are committed to interpreting their words within the safe, cultural context in which they were shared. After all, it is families that do the storytelling. Our responsibility is to use what they have shared to raise awareness and develop recommendations to influence positive change. Moreover, we recognize that ownership of this knowledge rests with the participating family members. Family members have control over what appears in the story and how it is presented.

While storytelling has profound benefits for both researchers and participating family members,<sup>4</sup> there are also challenges associated with conducting these interviews. Considering the high rates of poverty experienced by Aboriginal peoples in Canada, it is not surprising that some family members are without regular telephone



service or access to the internet. Yet without these technologies, it can be very difficult to build relationships (and in some cases even maintain contact) over long distances. In such instances, our capacity to facilitate the storytelling process is almost totally dependent on funds for travel. Unfortunately, like many Aboriginal women's organizations, NWAC has only limited resources to support for travel. Sadly, this lack of capacity has restricted the number of families we have been able to work with.

The storytelling process is further complicated by the potential for differing opinions around the presentation of the story. Family members may have differing perceptions or understandings of their loved one and her experiences, or may want her story presented in different ways. There are also challenges specific to sharing the story of a woman or girl whose disappearance or murder has not been solved. We are mindful that disclosing information not already in the public domain could potentially jeopardize an open police investigation. These are ongoing tensions, and there are no easy or uniform solutions. We consider each story carefully and discuss any concerns with participating family members. This speaks to the value of a relationship-based approach to research. Taking the time to establish a relationship with participating family members establishes a safe and comfortable context from which to approach potentially sensitive issues or opposing views. We have found that most differences are easily resolved through honest and respectful dialogue.

In addition to gathering primary data through interviews with family members, NWAC has created a database for recording information related to missing and murdered Aboriginal women and girls. Much of this information comes from secondary research,<sup>5</sup> including newspaper articles and other news sources, reported court decisions, and RCMP, provincial and municipal law enforcement websites. Other sources of secondary research include reports from family or community members, as well as information provided by key informants (i.e. police officers).

While we rely heavily on secondary research there are also some limitations associated with this method. We recognize the database likely does not, reflect the actual number of missing and murdered Aboriginal women and girls in Canada. Cases presented in the public domain reflect only incidents that are *reported* to police/media, b) *acknowledged* by police/media, and c) *publicized* by police/media. Cases that fail to meet these separate, but related, conditions are generally not reflected in our research results.<sup>6</sup>



In considering these limitations, it is necessary to remember the history of Aboriginal peoples in Canada as “over policed and under protected.”<sup>7</sup> This history affects the willingness and readiness of some families to contact police when a family member goes missing. Furthermore, while homicides are more likely than other crimes to be known to police and subject to investigation,<sup>8</sup> cases known to police are not necessarily reported in the media and as such may not be identified through secondary research methods.

For this reason it is also important to acknowledge the value of secondary research. Despite the limitations, media reports and other secondary sources are timely, national in scope, generally easy to access and have some level of accuracy especially when ‘checked’ against multiple sources. Access to national-level information is important because, as noted above, NWAC lacks the resources to support frequent travel. Expecting family and community members to share their knowledge and experiences with us without spending time in their community—without building relationships and trust—violates the ethics of conducting research with Aboriginal peoples.

Finally, it is important to acknowledge the physical, mental, emotional and spiritual impacts of this work on those who carry out the research. The feelings of grief, trauma and injustice associated with the issue of missing and murdered women and girls are, at times, overwhelming. In undertaking this work, we commit to caring for one another. We recognize that each person has special gifts. It is important to acknowledge and respect the strengths of all those involved and use these gifts as we work towards realizing the vision of the Sisters In Spirit initiative.<sup>9</sup>

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> In this report, “we” and “our” are used interchangeably with “NWAC.” While the work carried through the Sisters In Spirit initiative was designed by, carried out and belongs to NWAC, referring to the people involved in this process only as “NWAC” or the “organization” seemed too removed in the context of a discussion emphasizing the value of relationship building as a research ethic and the importance of a participant-oriented approach.

<sup>2</sup> Methodology can be defined as “a theory of how research is done or should proceed.” See: Abigail Brooks and Sharlene Nagy Hesse-Biber, “An Invitation to Feminist Research,” in *Feminist Research Praxis*, eds. Sharlene Nagy Hesse-Biber and Patricia Lina Leavy (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, Inc., 2007), 5.



<sup>3</sup> Primary research refers to the gathering of information that has not yet been documented.

<sup>4</sup> Robina Anne Thomas, “Honouring the Oral Traditions of my Ancestors Through Storytelling,” in *Research as Resistance*, eds. Leslie Brown and Susan Strega (Toronto: Canadian Scholar’s Press, 2005), 252.

<sup>5</sup> Secondary research refers to the collection and analysis of information that is already available.

<sup>6</sup> Exceptions include incidents identified through engagement with family members, community members, and key informants (i.e., police officers).

<sup>7</sup> *Report of the Aboriginal Justice Inquiry of Manitoba* (Winnipeg: Aboriginal Justice Inquiry, 1991), <http://www.ajic.mb.ca/volume.html> (accessed May 6, 2008).

<sup>8</sup> Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics, Statistics Canada, *Homicide in Canada, 2005* (Ottawa: Minister of Industry, 2006), 2.

<sup>9</sup> For a more detailed discussion of our research process, see *Sisters In Spirit Research Framework: Reflecting on Methodology and Process* (Ottawa: Native Women’s Association of Canada, March 2009).



## Introduction to Life Stories

**Amber Redman, Beatrice Sinclair, Daleen Kay Bosse (Muskego), Danita BigEagle, Debbie Sloss, Delores Whiteman, Georgina Papin, Nina Courtepatte and Terrie Ann Dauphinais**

Amber, Beatrice, Daleen, Danita, Debbie, Delores, Georgina, Nina and Terrie are loved by their families. For too long, Aboriginal women and girls in Canada have been denied their safety, their rights and their humanity. Media reports about missing and murdered Aboriginal women and girls frequently sensationalize the incidents, while saying little or nothing about the woman or girl and her unique experiences. Here the stories of the women and girls are told by their families.

The stories have several common themes. Five of the nine stories involve girls and women aged 25 or younger. Most of the incidents took place in urban areas, all but one of them in the western provinces. While Amber and Nina's stories illustrate positive interactions between families and the police, all of the other families raised serious concerns about the police response to the disappearance or murder of their daughter, sister, mother or grandmother. In several cases, it appears that police made decisions based on presuppositions about the woman or girl involved. This is particularly evident in cases of missing women and girls. In the stories of Daleen, Danita and Delores, their families describe having to convince police that their loved ones were indeed missing. The need to reclaim respect for Aboriginal women and girls, improve access to justice and provide better supports for families are clearly reflected in many of the stories.

The urgent need to address violence against women and girls became especially clear in compiling the stories of Amber and Daleen. Both young women were missing when their families began sharing their stories, but were found deceased before this work was published. In inviting families to share the story of their loved one, we are working to facilitate change by raising awareness about missing and murdered Aboriginal women and girls in Canada. Above all, we are privileged to have offered a safe space for families to honour their daughter, sister, mother or grandmother; to remember Amber, Beatrice, Daleen, Danita, Debbie, Delores, Georgina, Nina and Terrie.

*The life stories shared here are based on interviews with family members and, in some cases, supplemented with secondary source information.*





Amber with her mother,  
Gwenda Yuzicappi

## **“Wicanhpi Duta Win” / Red Star Woman: Amber Redman’s Story**

Amber Tara-Lynn Redman was born on January 30, 1986. Amber was from Standing Buffalo Dakota Nation; she was the middle child and only girl of loving parents Gwenda Yuzicappi and Art Redman Sr. She was very close to her older brother Bevin and her younger brother Dreyden. Amber went missing on July 15, 2005, and after almost three years of searching her remains were found on May 5, 2008.

Amber led a beautiful life filled with positive experiences. From the moment she was born at the General Hospital in Regina, Saskatchewan, Amber was loved by her mother and father. She brought joy into her family’s life and made everyone happy. Amber was breastfed and this mother-daughter bond continued as she grew into a chubby baby. When relatives came to visit baby Amber she would run to the door to greet them, her thick hair sticking out in all directions. Family members would constantly pick Amber up and place her on one of her favourite toys, a rocking horse. Amber was a “daddy’s girl” who was very spoiled; her father would carry her around until she fell asleep in his arms.

As Amber transitioned from baby to toddler, she became adventurous and mischievous. Her mother Gwenda remembers that Amber loved to be outside and could often be found wandering around in the bushes or playing with the puppies. When she was indoors Amber would watch her favourite show, *The Flintstones*, with her teddy bear. An intelligent toddler, Amber knew exactly what time the show would play.

When she was three years old Amber’s father, Art Sr., designed and beaded her first fancy dance outfit in her favourite colours, purple and pink, and her parents traveled with her on the powwow trail. Amber felt the pride of being a Dakota Winyan (woman) and dancing to the heartbeat of the drum inspired her Spirit to dance with All The Relatives. Amber danced to be a part of the Sacred Circle and to strengthen her Spirit; it was not about winning. Her spirit shone brightly as each step was a glimpse of what she was feeling. Amber enjoyed the inexplicable experience of being one with the Wannage (Spirit). Another inspiration for Amber was the Dakota language. This gift was taught by her great-grandmother, the late Agnes



Yuzicappi (Wakan Win); Unchi (Grandma) would speak in Dakota to Amber. Amber listened with her heart and captured each teaching there. Unchi inspired Amber to receive her Dakota name and Amber was honoured with the gift of her name “Wicanhpi Duta Win” (Red Star Woman). She wanted to learn about the Star Teachings, which are a vital part of the Dakota history. The family would see “Wicanhpi Duta Win” as she shone brightly as a “Red Star” in the night sky.

As she entered childhood, Amber’s parents ensured that she had a balance of traditional Dakota and western influences in her life. Gwenda and Art Sr. practiced the Dakota traditions. Amber’s parents allowed their children to choose the paths they wanted to follow. When she was 14 years old, an Elder asked Amber if she would consider being the Sundance Mother. Amber was honored to replay the history of the White Buffalo Calf Woman, who brought the teachings of the Sacred Pipe to the Lakota People. Amber witnessed and felt the power of prayer, sacrifice, being humble and being close to Wakan Tanka. At the end of this experience Amber left the Sacred Pipe for the People to continue to practice this teaching. She then exited on the same path that she began and turned four times with a wave to her Dakota Oyate (family). All the Helpers, Sundancers and Relatives felt in their Hearts the Love and Power of Prayer, which are the greatest gifts given by the Creator. Amber’s mind, body and spirit were in balance. Each story tells of Amber’s life experiences; she was seen in the Stars, the Animals, the Trees, the Rocks. Everything on Mother Earth has a Spirit and a Teaching.

Amber’s beauty was seen by a person who did not know her at all. This experience illustrates the teaching that some people have a gift that allows them to see the spirit of others. Here is a story told by Amber’s cousin, Jessica:

*Amber and Jessica attended a memorable powwow in Bismarck, North Dakota. There was a young man staying beside their camp site. When this young man saw Amber he fell in love with her beauty. He introduced himself to Amber and told her that she looked like a “princess.” He then asked if she would do him a favour. Amber was shy and turned away but Jessica encouraged her to listen to his request. The young man asked if she would take a picture with him coming out of the tipi. Amber began to laugh and walk away but the young man persisted explaining that his fellow singers would not believe he had a picture of him with this “princess.” Jessica once again encouraged Amber and insisted that there would be no harm in having this picture taken. Finally, Amber*



Amber as a baby

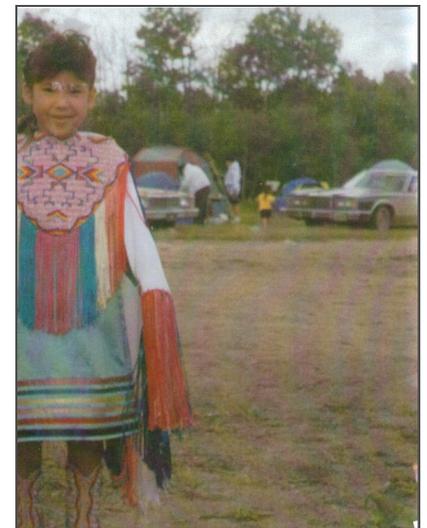


*agreed and they took the photograph. Amber felt embarrassed when she saw how happy this picture made him. When Amber went missing in 2005 and this young man saw her poster at a powwow, he asked Jessica, "Is this my princess?" When Jessica said yes, he turned and walked away from the powwow. Jessica felt his sorrow.*

Amber shared in the joy of her family's accomplishments and made sure to support their dreams and aspirations. Her older brother, Bevin, competed in basketball at the North American Indigenous Games (NAIG) and he told Amber that he wanted her to watch his game. Amber had recently started a new job. When she asked for the time off work and was denied, Amber followed her heart and decided to quit. She explained to her employer that her brother was her priority and watching him play against New York was a once in a lifetime experience. Amber was excited to watch Bevin play his best. The whole family was proud of Bevin. When the game was over, Gwenda brought Amber and Dreyden to eat at a revolving restaurant at the top of a high-rise building (Bevin had to stay with his team). The three of them shared in the experience of tasting escargot. Dreyden said he was eating octopus and Amber used her fork to pick it up so she could see, smell and then taste it. She said it was gross. Gwenda enjoyed watching each of their reactions as these experiences are kept in a Mother's Heart. Gwenda strongly believes the greatest gift from the Creator is the gift of a child.

Amber saw gifts given by the Creator. Amber and her mom witnessed a gift being born and Amber named this baby girl after her late paternal grandfather and her late paternal great-grandmother. Amber became one with the baby and later encouraged her mom to bring the baby home. Amber asked if she could adopt the beautiful little girl and Gwenda agreed. Amber's heart pounded with excitement when she held her baby girl. To this day, the young girl talks endlessly about Amber. When she sees Gwenda struggling, she sits down beside Gwenda and uses her healing hands to caress Gwenda's hair and wipe her tears. She tells stories of Amber. Only Amber knew of this young girl's gifts and Gwenda will ensure she reaches her full potential.

Amber was athletic and enjoyed playing basketball and volleyball in high school. She and five friends from Standing Buffalo were on the basketball and volleyball teams and Amber loved traveling with them to compete in tournaments. Amber's passion for sports and being with her team showed when she played. She would smile at her teammates, played her best and used humour in each game.



Amber in her first fancy dance outfit

After she disappeared Amber sent a message to her loving companion, Cody, when he went to NAIG in Denver, Colorado. Once a great athlete, Cody stopped playing sports after Amber went missing. When he decided to return, he tried out for North American Indigenous Games and made the Saskatchewan athletics (track and field) team. The night before the competition began he dreamed of Amber. In his dream he felt Amber was real. He held her and continually told her “Oh, my God, I can’t believe I am with you!” Amber took Cody to the very top of the mountain where the clouds were below. In the dream he took off his jacket and put it on the ground so that Amber could sit down. Cody tickled and hugged her and watched every smile. He especially remembers her laughter echoing in the air. Amber asked Cody why he stopped playing sports until then. She knew of his potential. Amber pointed into the clouds and Cody saw his bedroom wall and on it were three medals. Cody was so happy to be with Amber that he did not think of the medals. All he wanted to do was hold her and keep her close. He was not going to let her go.

Cody woke up and realized it was a dream. He quickly called Gwenda and told her of his dream. Gwenda and Cody became emotional over the phone and Gwenda told Cody that no matter where he is, distance is not a factor. Her spirit traveled to his and this is where their spirits united as one. Gwenda explained to Cody that he would always be her only son-in-law, he would always be a part of her family. Gwenda said to Cody, “Amber brought you a message to be the best, the athlete she knows you to be. Cody, follow your heart and your dreams will come true.” Cody came home with three medals which are with Amber’s medals.

Amber’s childhood and youth were not without some hardship. Amber was unhappy when her parents separated. Additionally, as a teenager Amber was bullied by girls who were jealous of her relationship with her boyfriend. Because her teachings instructed her not to fight but to leave the situation, Amber endured the pain of verbal abuse without retaliating. She came home crying and the anger grew in her Mother’s Heart as Amber told her mom of the experience. Her mom suggested they talk with the girls. Amber’s response was, “No Mom, I just want to forget this happened.” Gwenda held her daughter close and told her everything would be alright. Amber fell asleep in her mother’s arms. Gwenda thinks the moral of this story is forgiveness; in spite of the pain she endured, Amber forgave these three young girls for their verbal abuse and for keeping her cornered in a room. Gwenda has a message for Amber: “My girl, as your mother, I now understand why you chose not to confront these young girls but to forgive in your heart.”

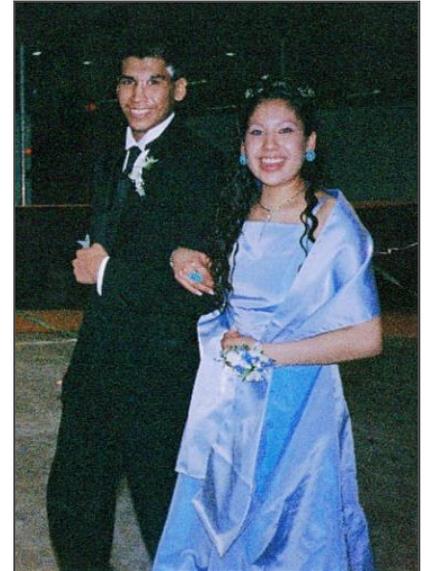


Amber was a very independent woman. She bought herself a car with her bingo winnings. Driving on a grid road through mud, slush and snow was hard on the car; it needed a mirror, a muffler and an oil change. Amber bought the parts and drove her car onto a ramp in her driveway where she herself changed the oil and replaced the muffler. Two of Bevin's friends came over while Amber was working on the car and asked Bevin what she was doing. Bevin told them that Amber just gave her car an oil change and now she was changing her muffler. Bevin's friends laughed and insisted Amber did not know how to repair these things. When they realized that Amber really was fixing her car, they felt embarrassed and resorted to teasing one another. Amber's ability to accept and complete a challenge was evident on this day. Bevin was so proud of his sister and how she showed up his friends.

On July 15, 2005, Amber went to Trapper's Bar in Fort Qu'Appelle with Cody and her cousin Tommy. Earlier that day Amber got paid for babysitting. She took her aunt and cousins out for pizza and chicken. By the time Gwenda got home Amber was already gone. It was unlike Amber to go out to the bar on a Thursday night. When Gwenda asked the waitress about Amber, she said she served Amber only two drinks and was surprised when Amber fell and appeared intoxicated. Gwenda believes something was slipped into Amber's drink. Amber and Cody had an argument in the bar that night and Cody left. Tommy said he went to the bathroom and when he came out he could not find Amber. Amber had Tommy's car keys so he called his mom who came to get him. This was the last time Amber was seen by those close to her.

Cody called Gwenda every day to see if Amber was home. When Gwenda asked what happened, Cody told her about the argument. Knowing this, Gwenda told Cody that Amber may need some time and advised him to call back the next day. On Monday morning, Cody filed a missing persons report then called Gwenda to tell her. Gwenda was in shock. Six days after Amber was last seen, Gwenda, her family and the community organized the first of a series of searches that lasted for three weeks. The neighbouring communities volunteered to help out. Gwenda's family and community continued to search endlessly. It took nine days before the media began to cover Amber's disappearance. Despite this delay, Gwenda felt that the media coverage of Amber as a missing woman was both helpful and respectful.

Gwenda does not believe that the police took immediate action to initiate a search. The police explained to the family that they were following a process where they had to contact and interview everyone



Amber with her brother, Bevin, at graduation



in the bar and Gwenda understood that this process was time-consuming. Gwenda asked to deal primarily with a female First Nations police officer and this request was honoured. As the days passed, police gave the family daily updates, offered support and let them know that officers were only a phone call away. It is evident that the police's determination and dedication resulted in locating Amber's remains. The Yuzicappi and Redman families showed their gratitude towards the many law enforcement officers who participated in this process by shaking each one of their hands and thanking them for their efforts. As Amber's mother, Gwenda understands that although none of the officers knew Amber, seeing her picture spoke a thousand words. Gwenda believes in the prayers that were also sent to the police officers to assist in their efforts.

Amber and her family received strength from the Unchi Hanwi Oyate (Grandmother Nation). As each full moon passed, the Grandmother's face appeared in the moon and her lips whispered prayers onto the family. Gwenda has a message for the Grandmother: "Unchi, I know in my heart you are with me during this time of hardship. Unchi, you told my Tanke (younger sister) that when the family smells the scent of sweetgrass you are with us. Your strength is felt as each second passes and only you know the pain endured in this travesty. Unchi, I am starting to grasp the understanding that Wakan Tanka (Great Spirit) honoured me with the gift of Wicanhpi Duta Win. Through my Ancestral Teachings, I was sought out to be one of the Inas (Mothers) who is able to gain strength from these teachings with the power of prayer. I know, Unchi, that you were with Wicanhpi Duta Win along with All Our Relatives. As a mother, knowing this gives me so much comfort as I now understand Wicanhpi Duta Win was not alone."

Gwenda and Amber's family believe strongly in the power of prayer and hoped for Amber's safe return home. Her family continually asked the Grandmother Nation to help locate their loved one. The enduring pain of not knowing where Amber was and whether or not she was safe was excruciating for her mother, brothers, grandmother, sisters, her loving companion, aunts, uncles, cousins and nieces, as well as for the loved ones who have journeyed to the Spirit World, including her father, uncles, aunts and grandmother. The family's love for Amber was in the hands of the Creator. As each season passed, the family fed Amber's Dakota Spirit to keep her spirit alive. The family did not know where Amber was so they asked the Creator to keep her alive in their hearts.

On May 5, 2008, Amber's remains were located. The Yuzicappi and Redman families went to the site where she was found to offer



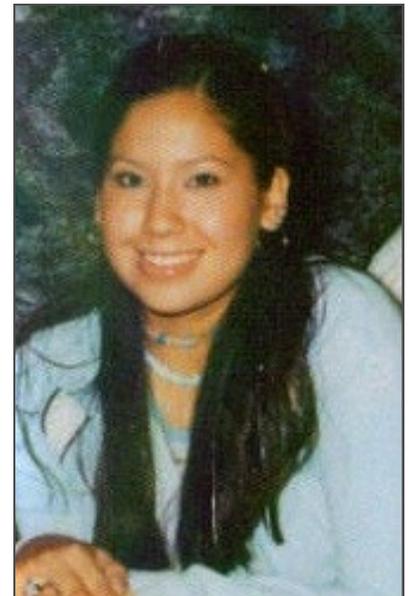
Amber with her great-grandmother, Agnes

prayers and sing the sacred songs. The ceremony was one of the many that the family held regarding Amber's journey to the Spirit World. The family felt and heard the presence of All Our Relatives and this confirmed that Amber was not alone on the day her life was taken so tragically from the physical world. Gwenda gave thanks to Amber's father, the late Art Redman Sr., for fulfilling his promise that no matter what he would find his "baby girl." Exactly seven months to the day that Amber was found, her father journeyed to the Spirit World. Art knew the pain that the family was going through and he did everything he could to assist in bringing his daughter home.

Art told Gwenda that Amber came to him as he was driving. Amber asked her Dad to bring her home. Art was determined to fulfill his "baby girl's" request. Art showed his love for Amber when she was born and he held her in his arms until she fell asleep, when he designed her regalia of her first outfit, when he listened to her words "I Love You, Dad" as she gave him a hug each time she saw him. Amber said her heart would race with excitement when love was shared in their hugs. Art was proud of his daughter at her graduation. Amber asked her father if he would keep her Eagle Feather for her and he did. Art and Amber now share an everlasting life where there is Love, Peace and Teachings. Gwenda believes Art and Amber are happy and that Art continues to be the best father he can be for Amber. She believes that if their family calls on both of them they will help guide us. Gwenda says, "I look forward to that beautiful day when I will see Wicanhpi Duta Win and All My Relatives."

On May 13, just over a week after Amber's remains were found, as Gwenda and her family sat outside, Amber's cousin Tanya whispered to Gwenda, "Look behind you." When Gwenda turned she saw two beautiful buffalos walking up the pathway towards the fence. Gwenda offered a prayer then patiently watched each movement they made. The bigger buffalo looked at the women three times and proceeded to walk down the valley and then up the other side of the hill. When the buffalo reached the top of the hill she began to dance, turning around and around and kicking up both back legs. Tears filled each of their eyes as they watched this beautiful buffalo's graceful dance. In her heart Gwenda knew Amber came back to let her know that she was alive in the Buffalo Spirit. Later that night, Gwenda received a call confirming that more of Amber's remains were located. Gwenda believes that Amber came to bring strength to her family before they would receive this news, to encourage and help them to remain strong in prayer.

Amber sent another beautiful message to her family as they prepared for her final journey. The family was preparing for a ceremony



Amber Redman,  
January 30th, 1986 -  
July 15th, 2005



offering food and prayers when Amber's nephew, Dallon, witnessed four deer dancing from each of the four directions. As each deer danced towards the centre of the circle, the flowers within the circle turned red, yellow, white and black.

Gwenda forgot the bowls, cups and utensils to feed the family so she invited everyone to her home to eat. As each person entered her yard, they could see a big buffalo running towards the house. As the buffalo got closer to the house, she switched pace and began to walk. Gwenda offered prayers and thanks for experiencing Amber's message of thanks for her family's prayer and strength. As the Buffalo Spirit brought strength to the family, their prayers were answered.

Gwenda, as Amber's mother, was given the ability to prepare for her journey to the Spirit World. Gwenda also realizes that there are many families out there who take each step not knowing where their loved one is. Seconds and days pass and families continue to live with excruciating pain, a pain that will not be forgotten. Gwenda's heart and prayers are with all the families who have loved ones who are still missing or who have been murdered. Gwenda will be there to support and offer her prayers to you.

Amber came back to her family in different forms of life to let them know that she was found, that she loves and misses them, but she is happy to be with Our Relatives in a place where there is everlasting love and no harm can ever be brought upon her again. Gwenda continues to tell the story of her daughter's life and gives thanks to the Creator for allowing her to be Amber's mother and experience the love and teachings Amber shared with those around her. Gwenda would like to dedicate these messages to four beautiful girls named after Amber: Patience Amber, Isabelle, Amber Rose and Kaneshia Amber. Gwenda believes that the Spirit of Amber will live strongly in each one of these beautiful young women. Gwenda, as Amber's mother, will be watchful of Amber's teachings and she will offer thanks as each is received by the young girls. Pidamiye! Wopida! Midakuye Owasin!

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#### **Update:**

Amber's remains were found on May 5, 2008 on Little Black Bear First Nation after a police sting operation. Two men, Albert Patrick Bellegarde, 29, and Gilbert Allan Bellegarde, 31, were charged with first degree murder. On December 12, 2008 the Crown stayed the first degree murder charge against Gilbert Bellegarde. On January 22, 2009 Albert Bellegarde pled guilty to second degree murder and was sentenced to life in prison with no chance of parole for 15 years.



The family believes only one portion of the story was told by Albert Bellegarde's sentence. They feel that justice has been only partially served and that Gilbert Bellegarde should also be held responsible for his actions. Gwenda also firmly believes that some members of Little Black Bear First Nation knew what happened to Amber and kept silent. She believes it is important for First Nations communities to speak out in order to ensure that Aboriginal women and girls are safe.

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### **A Message from Gwenda on behalf of Amber's Family:**

*Amber will not be forgotten. I will continue to speak out regarding my daughter's murder. I have written a poem for my daughter:*

*I call to the Grandmothers in the West...hear my prayer...  
I call on the Grandmothers in the North...hear my prayer...  
I call on the Grandmothers in the East...hear my prayer...  
I call on the Grandmothers in the South...hear my prayer.  
Wicanhpi Duta Win I feel your presence...I listen to each message  
that you send...I see your beauty within the animals and the elements  
of Mother Earth...I am beginning to understand your purpose from  
which the Creator has given your spirit.*

*Creator, I give thanks for allowing me to be her mother, as do her  
father, her brothers, her grandmothers, her niece, her uncle, her  
auntie, her cousin, her friends... for allowing me to learn from her  
teachings...for allowing me to understand each gift she inspired.  
Wicanhpi Duta Win, we are honoured to be a part of you.*

*All my Relatives, I am pitiful, small and weak. I ask for your guidance  
and understanding as each day passes.*

*This journey that our family has endured taught us patience and  
enhanced our love as a family. When situations are difficult we think  
about the teachings they provide: Learn Life's Lessons, strengthen  
our Dakota Nation and ensure Prayers are being heard from the  
Wakan Tanka.*

*It has been very difficult to comprehend all that has happened within  
the last few months. In January 2009, our family was called to the  
Fort Qu'Appelle Detachment to hear the details and ask questions of  
Amber's murder. The very next day in the Court of Queen's Bench in  
Regina, SK we heard every detail of her tragedy. Amber's family felt  
the pain that she went through. It was very difficult to be in the same  
room as the person who murdered Amber and hear the story of how*



*he disrespected a Dakota Woman. The auntie asked Albert Bellegarde to look at her but he did not have the strength to lift his head as we shared our stories of Amber's personality, of her family's love, of her many gifts. If only he had known who Amber was as a Dakota woman.*

*We do not believe that justice has been served. It was two years and ten months before arrests were made. One man remained in custody until sentencing, but the other was released in July 2008 and the charges against him have since been stayed. It is hard to understand. How is it that two men were charged with first-degree murder but eight months later one pleads guilty to second-degree murder and the other walks free?*

*It was very difficult to be in the same room as this person who took Amber's life and hear the story of how he murdered a Dakota Woman. I have been told that Amber forgave these two men for what they did to her. Amber's purpose here on Earth was to bring this issue of the missing and murdered Women to the forefront because society did not see this as a priority. Search deep within your hearts and listen to the teachings that the Women bring to each family and let us not forget their role as Women.*

*We, as Women, are givers of life. We, as Women, have rights. Where are the leaders? Why are our missing and murdered Women not made a priority? I believe that if my daughter was a Caucasian Woman her disappearance would have made the national headlines, that the search for her would have begun immediately, that the media would have continued to keep her story alive and that people would have come from all walks of life to help in the search.*

*Leaders, help the many, many families who have missing loved ones. Too often the result is that our loved one is found murdered. We, as Canadians, tend to believe we live in a country that is rich in equality and rights. As one mother, I am challenging our leaders to initiate this change. Prioritize our Women's rights, put aside your meetings and stand strong beside our Women. Help us end the silence.*

*We need that balance to help find a solution as to why our Women are going missing and being murdered. Our communities need to take responsibility for the safety of our women and girls. Wrongs must be made into rights. We must honour the teachings of respect, honesty, empathy and compassion. I understand there is a Brothers in Spirit group who believe strongly that our Women need the strength from the Men, who believe this balance is a step in finding a solution to this issue.*



*I will be having a four year Memorial for the late Amber Redman and I want to invite each one who reads this story to come and join in celebrating her life as a Dakota Woman. There will be a Women's Volleyball Tournament and a Men's 3 on 3 Basketball Tournament. Amber enjoyed these sports and My family believes she will be there with us laughing, enjoying this time with all who attend. Lastly, Amber wanted me to personally thank all who contributed to solving this crime. Pidamiye! Wopida! (Thank you) Midakuye Owasin (All My Relatives)!*





## **Granny Beatrice's Teachings: Beatrice Sinclair's Story**

Beatrice Harriet Passage Sinclair was from Brokenhead Ojibway Nation. She was born in Peguis First Nation around 1909. She was the oldest of 18 siblings. At 65 years of age, Beatrice was

found raped and beaten to death under a bridge in Winnipeg. Her body was laid to rest on the Brokenhead Ojibway Nation.

Beatrice is remembered as a beloved grandmother and a strong Cree woman. She had at least three homes on the Brokenhead reserve where she was the primary caregiver to many of her grandchildren. Her granddaughter, Sharon Bruyere, has fond memories of the enormous role her Granny played in her childhood.

One of Sharon's most cherished childhood memories is a testament to Beatrice's loving and warm-hearted character. Sharon remembers sleepovers at Beatrice's house in Brokenhead where there was no electricity or running water. The grandchildren would sleep with Granny Beatrice in her big, old steel frame bed with heavy blankets piled atop them tightly. Come morning, Beatrice would get up, put her slippers on and tell all of the grandchildren to stay in bed until the kitchen was warm. Before long they would smell breakfast cooking and Beatrice would call out, "Come to the kitchen, stay warm!"

Sharon's biological mother was an alcoholic and she considers her Granny Beatrice the closest thing she had to a mother. Beatrice taught Sharon valuable work skills while always ensuring that Sharon and her other grandchildren balanced work and play. One year the grandchildren wanted to celebrate Halloween but they had no costumes and to make matters worse a huge snowstorm had just hit the reserve. Beatrice was determined that her grandchildren should have fun on this occasion so she dressed them up in old clothes, used her makeup to paint their faces and carted them down the road on a sled to collect candy and apples. Beatrice went to these lengths to make her grandchildren feel good.

As a head of the family, Beatrice passed down the teachings she had gathered throughout her life to her grandchildren. Whether teaching through her actions or espousing certain values, Beatrice made sure that her grandchildren were well-raised. Beatrice would always offer coffee or tea to anyone who came into her home and would feed them



whenever she could. Her guests would sit by the stove to keep warm. In addition to these manners, Beatrice taught Sharon to be respectful and to love children. Beatrice taught her grandchildren how to use leaves and herbs for medicinal purposes, passing on Cree traditional knowledge. Sharon and her cousin Sharon Ward still carry these teachings and values given to them by Beatrice.

Sharon was only 10 years old when Granny Beatrice died in 1974. At this age, Sharon had not experienced death and did not understand what relatives meant when they told her that her grandmother “died.” It was not until the day of the funeral, the day they took Beatrice’s body to the church, that Sharon began to understand death. She cried, “I’ll never see my Granny anymore. There will be no one to comfort me, keep me warm, make me duck soup, make me moccasins, tell me that she loved me. She was the only one that said that she loved me. My Gram was very, very important.”

Alcoholism was present in Beatrice’s family, a fact that could be related to many family members’ attendance at residential school. Sharon recalls not being able to properly mourn her grandmother on the day of the funeral because of the drinking that took place. With Beatrice no longer alive to shelter her grandchildren from alcoholism in the family, Sharon’s life started to spiral downwards. Nevertheless, the values Beatrice had instilled in Sharon gave her the strength and ability to take care of her siblings.

Beatrice’s niece, Sarah Ward, was the last person to see her alive. The night she disappeared, Sarah saw Beatrice walking on Main Street in Winnipeg with a man she later found out was a retired police officer. Beatrice never went anywhere without telling people her whereabouts and when she did not return to her niece’s house the next day, Sarah tried to file a missing persons report with the Winnipeg Police Service. The police asserted that Beatrice could not be considered a missing person until she had been gone for one week and refused to accept the report.

The night before Beatrice’s body was found, she came to her great-niece Sharon Ward. Sharon woke up in the middle of the night and saw Beatrice standing there; it was her spirit. Beatrice was telling Sharon that she was going home, to which Sharon replied, “See you in Brokenhead.” Beatrice said, “I’m not going to Brokenhead. I’m going home.” Sharon knew that Beatrice was gone.

Beatrice’s body was found that evening, May 14, 1974, by three children who were friends of the family. Her niece Sarah was told by police that Beatrice must have gotten dizzy and fallen over the



Marion Street bridge. They contended that her clothes were torn off when the river current beat her body against rocks. Her clothing was never found.

It was not until Sharon reached adulthood that she learned the truth about Beatrice's death. She was researching facts about missing and murdered Aboriginal women in Manitoba when she came across her grandmother's name. As she read the report, Sharon recalls, "It was like my mind left my body. I had to sit there and try and try and control the tears."

Sharon was shocked to discover that much of the information stated in the police report ran contrary to what she and other family members knew about Beatrice's death. Sharon and her cousin Roselyn Tait were told that their Granny was beaten to death under a bridge and were surprised to read that her cause of death was listed as asphyxiation. Although Beatrice had sustained injuries inflicted by a person, including being unclothed and dragged and dumped under a bridge, according to the report those injuries "were not serious enough to cause death."

The most shocking part of the report, however, was that Beatrice was found with an abnormally high blood alcohol level of .288. In all of the time that she spent with her grandmother, Sharon has no recollection of Beatrice ever being drunk. Sharon does not remember Beatrice having a drink or going to a party. Beatrice was always with her grandchildren.

Beatrice's grandchildren do not feel that her memory is being honoured the way it should. There are no pictures to tell the story of the beautiful and strong grandmother from the Brokenhead Ojibway Nation. Reports suggest that Beatrice was living in Winnipeg when in reality she had homes in Brokenhead and at the time of her death was only in Winnipeg to visit her sister Pearl Olson (Sarah Ward's mother). Above all, the hardest thing for Sharon and her cousins to deal with is not knowing what happened to their grandmother. It has been over 30 years since her death and Beatrice's grandchildren have come to terms with the possibility that this murder likely never will be solved. But that does not stop them from looking for answers to ease their minds and, most importantly, to give their grandmother the acknowledgement and respect that she deserves.

Beatrice taught her grandchildren to respect the people who come through your door; they are there to visit you, so you must give them that time. Beatrice was not given the same respect in death as she



offered those around her in life. Beatrice and her teachings live on in the form of her grandchildren, their children and generations to come that will always have a piece of Granny Beatrice.

*This story is based on Sharon Bruyere's personal experiences with her grandmother. She encourages other members of Beatrice's family to share their stories as well.*





**Daleen Kay Bosse (Muskego)**  
**March 25, 1979 - May 19, 2004**

*Daleen's story was written in the spring and early summer of 2008. In August 2008, she was found 10 miles north of Saskatoon, near Martensville, Saskatchewan. Daleen's family has provided an update, which appears at the end of this story.*

Daleen Kay Bosse (Muskego) was last seen on May 18, 2004, in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan. Her family has been

looking for her since, organizing search parties and awareness walks, establishing a toll-free number and financing trips across Canada to investigate tips. Her family and friends want answers; they want to know what has happened to the beautiful and outgoing woman who wants to be a teacher, who loves to make people laugh, who has a passion for drama and fine arts. They want to know what has happened to their beloved daughter, sister, mother, wife and friend.

Daleen was born on March 25, 1979, in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan. Her parents, Herb and Pauline Muskego, were overjoyed by her arrival. Herb and Pauline would have two more children and Daleen quickly matured into a caring, devoted and protective sister to her younger brothers, Dana and David. Pauline, both of her parents and Herb's mother attended residential school and these experiences made the Muskegos absolutely determined to be good parents, to give their children a different experience than their own.

As a girl, Daleen spent time in both Saskatoon and her home community of Onion Lake Cree Nation. Her extended family was very involved in her life. They taught her Cree greetings, beadwork and how to make bannock. Daleen was particularly close to her grandmother and Herb recalls how little "Daleen sko" (meaning Daleen Woman in Cree) loved to recount every detail of their time together. As an infant, Daleen was given a Cree name in a traditional ceremony and was later dedicated in the church.

As parents, Herb and Pauline wanted their children to see as much of the world as possible. They tried to broaden their horizons, taking them to fairs, on trips to Edmonton and the mountains and bigger trips to Disneyland and Mexico. Herb and Pauline tried to include their children in everything they did. The family would often have a concession booth at powwows and Daleen would work alongside her siblings, parents and grandparents. "Broadening horizons" also meant



working to give Daleen and her brothers the opportunity to try different sports and activities. As a girl Daleen was incredibly active. She took ballet lessons, swimming lessons, skating, piano, gymnastics, acting; she tried a bit of everything!

Daleen was only 13 when she got her first job working in a restaurant. She was determined to start working and although her parents did not push her to get a job they were incredibly proud to see her do so. A few years later, in grade ten, she got a job in a Lloydminster bank as part of a high school work experience initiative.

In high school, Daleen became involved in drama and speech writing. She was a very good actress and quickly developed a love for drama and the arts. She was also involved in modeling and public speaking. Daleen would later act for the Saskatoon Native Theatre in one of its very first plays, the making of which was chronicled in the 2003 documentary *Circle of Voices*. In addition to her passion for the arts, Daleen was also academically inclined, earning excellent grades. An ambitious girl, she talked about becoming a doctor or a lawyer. Her parents encouraged her to follow her dreams, telling Daleen and her brothers that they had the potential to become whatever they wanted to be. Both Pauline and Herb are teachers and Pauline believes that their work had an influence on Daleen, who would eventually decide to become a teacher as well.

Daleen's outgoing nature brought her many close friends. People were drawn to her caring personality and her positive outlook. She had a real impact on those around her. Shortly after she disappeared, Herb and Pauline received a concerned call from Daleen's eighth grade teacher. After inquiring about her whereabouts, he commented that Daleen was "one of his all-time excellent students." And months later, at one of the many searches organized to look for Daleen, another reminder of her compassionate nature came when a young man stepped forward, saying he had come to search because Daleen had helped him with his schoolwork when they were younger.

After graduating from high school Daleen considered applying for a theatre program in Toronto, but ultimately decided to stay in Saskatoon near her friends and family. She eventually settled on a course in business administration. It was here that Daleen met her future husband, Jeremiah. After six months of dating, Jeremiah proposed to Daleen on Valentine's Day. They were married in 1999 and their daughter Faith was born two years later. At the time of her disappearance Daleen was beginning her fourth year as a student at the University of Saskatchewan where she was studying to become a teacher like her parents.



Daleen's graduation picture, June, 1997

Daleen was last seen on May 18, 2004, outside a Saskatoon nightclub. She never came home. When Jeremiah woke up the next morning and realized that Daleen was missing, he immediately called the Saskatoon Police Service (SPS). An officer came to the house, asked two or three questions and left. The family characterizes the police response as being “shrugged off and brushed to the side.” It was Daleen’s family who made the first missing person posters, plastering them all over Saskatoon. After eight desperate days of searching, the family hired a private investigator to assist them in finding Daleen.

In the 2007 documentary, *Stolen Sisters*, Sergeant Phil Farion attempts to explain the Saskatoon Police Service’s response by saying, “Because right off the bat you would say, ‘Well there’s no reason for my family member to leave, so it has to be criminal. Someone has taken her. It has to be.’ And yet, often times it’s not and sometimes people go away and come back.” Daleen’s family and friends are unmoved by this reasoning saying simply, but resolutely, that Daleen would never leave her daughter for so long; she would never not call.

On June 4, two weeks after Daleen went missing, a family friend spotted Daleen and Jeremiah’s white Cavalier parked on a street off Central Avenue. He immediately called Jeremiah, then the police. A search revealed that the steering wheel cover, floor mats and seat covers had been removed from the vehicle and that Faith’s car seat had been moved. In addition, several hundred kilometers had been put on the vehicle. To the surprise of Daleen’s family and friends police did not perform a forensic search of the vehicle. They did, however, dust the car for prints, but found none. Daleen’s family, friends and the private investigator hired by the Muskegos believe that the missing items are related to Daleen’s disappearance, evidence of an obvious “clean-up.” The police were unconvinced, saying that the items may have been stolen from the vehicle during the three week period it sat abandoned. Investigators did not hold the car for long; it was returned to Jeremiah two or three days after it was found.

Seven months after her car was found abandoned Daleen was still missing. Her credit cards and bank account remained untouched. In January 2005, the SPS announced that Daleen’s disappearance was “more serious than a missing person that doesn’t want to be found.” A press conference was held and police appealed to the public to help them in locating the items taken from Daleen’s vehicle. Police also performed a complete forensic investigation of the vehicle, but found nothing. However, it is possible that forensic evidence *was* present at the time the car was recovered, but was lost (through wear or routine



Daleen and newborn daughter, Faith

cleaning) during the seven months the car was in use. It is very difficult for Daleen's family to consider that valuable forensic evidence may have been lost due to police inaction. They are left to wonder if a more thorough investigation of the vehicle would have yielded a break in the case, a clue that might have led them to Daleen.

When asked about their relationship with the police in Saskatoon the Muskegos use words like "injustice," "anger" and "roadblocks" to describe their experiences. In the days after their daughter went missing it quickly became apparent that police believed Daleen was going to come home on her own. When Herb and Pauline filed a missing person report, police were quick to emphasize that most missing persons return home within 10 to 14 days. When weeks passed without any communication from Daleen, police replaced their initial assurances with new ones, telling Herb and Pauline that missing persons often return home for important family events like birthdays or Christmas and to wait a little longer.

Again and again the Muskegos were told to wait. When they pressed for action they were met with resistance, apathy and in some instances, patronizing excuses. Pauline recalls one particular instance in which the Sergeant responsible for the case responded to their concerns by saying that the files for missing persons in Saskatchewan were a foot high. He said, "These are the missing persons cases that are in Saskatchewan right now. And your daughter's is right here, down at the bottom." The Muskegos were told repeatedly that cases concerning missing children had priority, and while they respect this policy Herb and Pauline say *something* should have been done about their daughter's disappearance. Instead, they feel the police response amounted to saying, "Ok, she's missing, stick her there on the pile, she's just a number." Many times they tried to see the Sergeant responsible for missing persons only to be told he was not there. They came to feel as though no one was doing anything at all.

Frustrated by the lack of cooperation and the unwillingness of police to accept Daleen's disappearance as a serious case, Herb and Pauline made complaints. They voiced their anger and demanded action. The police responded by citing the numerous tips they had received about Daleen's whereabouts, that she had been seen here or there and not to worry, she was going to come home. The Muskegos felt, however, that the police were attaching too much weight to the supposed sightings, sightings that were in their opinion unsubstantiated. A few weeks after she went missing police received a tip that Daleen had been seen at a bank in Saskatoon, the same bank where she had worked after graduating from the business administration program. Newspaper reports suggest that police were fairly confident about the



Daleen and Faith, when Faith was seven months old

sighting since the tip came from a woman who had worked with Daleen. Herb and Pauline regarded the sighting with caution, they wanted proof. However, when asked to see the bank's surveillance footage they were told that the cameras were down the day of the sighting. They then asked police to check Daleen's bank records as she had been seen waiting in line to access an ATM. They were told that there was no record of any transaction. In fact, the only evidence that Daleen had ever been in the bank rested with the word of woman who had not seen Daleen for years.



Daleen and family on Faith's 3rd birthday

Daleen was supposedly seen at several other Saskatoon locations: a mall, a 7-11, a nightclub. In each instance Herb and Pauline asked to view surveillance tapes and in each instance they were told by police that it was not necessary for them to see the footage. Pauline considers the unwillingness of police to share surveillance footage one of the most frustrating roadblocks in their search for Daleen. The police wanted Herb and Pauline to accept that Daleen had disappeared willingly yet refused to provide them with any real proof that this was actually the case. And without proof Herb and Pauline say there was no choice but to continue looking. "Without proof, we'll continue to look forever until we find her," says Pauline.

When Christmas 2004 passed with no communication from Daleen, the Muskegos had had enough. They were very active in the month of January increasing not only their search efforts but also their engagement with the media. In the months after Daleen went missing, Pauline made a point of avoiding the media. She says talking about Daleen's disappearance was too hard; she could not face being interviewed and both she and Herb worried about how their family might be portrayed. It was the coverage surrounding the death of Neil Stonechild that eventually changed their minds about the media. The attention surrounding the case, as well as statements by family members crediting certain reporters for their coverage, showed them that the media could be used as tool, a tool to raise awareness about Daleen's disappearance and assist them in their search. Since then, they have been trying to use the media as much as possible. In addition to the support they have received from family, from their community and from other organizations like the Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations (FSIN) and Child Find Canada, the Muskegos say that their engagement with the media has led to support from other groups and individuals that otherwise might not have known about Daleen's disappearance.



Daleen Kay Bosse (Muskego)

After months of frustration and no discernable police action, the Muskegos lodged a complaint with the FSIN Special Investigations Unit. Herb and Pauline believe it was this action that prompted the SPS to finally respond seriously to Daleen's disappearance. Herb goes on to note that something curious happened after Daleen's disappearance was declared a criminal investigation. Herb called to speak to the Sergeant responsible for missing persons and was surprised to learn that he was no longer there, that he had retired. Pauline and Herb do not know if the Sergeant's seemingly abrupt exit was merely coincidental but consider the timing suggestive.

In December 2006, Chief Clive Weighill of the SPS came to Onion Lake to speak to Daleen's family and the Chief and Council about the police response to Daleen's disappearance. The family had mixed feelings about the visit. While they appreciated the gesture, Daleen is still missing and they cannot help but feel that the case would have been handled differently if Daleen was not an Aboriginal woman. Herb says, "It is not from their good will that they decided they were going to seriously look at the case. It was because of our consistency. We were at their door...My family, my community." Daleen's family continues to search, continues to pray for their daughter, for their sister, for their mother, wife and friend. For Daleen.

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**In October 2008, Daleen's family provided the following update:**

*August 10, 2008 – Chief Weighill, true to his word, requested a meeting in person to inform the family of new information they had received about Daleen.*

*August 11, 2008 – The accused made his first court appearance in Saskatoon. He was charged with first-degree murder and indignity to a body. Daleen's family describes the second charge as "excruciatingly painful," as they did not know that Daleen's body had been burned.*

*August 12, 2008 – The accused made his second court appearance in Saskatoon.*

*And so on and so on. The preliminary hearing is scheduled to begin in April 2009.*





Danita at age 15

## **“It won’t always be like this”: Danita BigEagle’s Story**

Danita Faith BigEagle was born in Arcola, Saskatchewan, on March 6, 1984. She is the mother of two children, Cassidy and Talon, and she has five brothers and sisters. Danita has been missing since February 11, 2007.

Danita was a quiet and happy child from Ocean Man First Nation. She loved movies and music and enjoyed watching her sisters dance. The youngest of six children, Danita’s older sisters and brother were always there to ensure her safety; in fact, her two sisters acted like mini mothers to Danita. Beloved by her parents Dianne and Doug BigEagle, Danita was happiest when they were together. She shared a close relationship with her mother. Her father was protective of his little girl. When Danita brought a boyfriend home as a teen her father grilled him, “Do you have a job? Do you have a car?” to which the boy replied, “I’m only 14!” At that, Danita’s father showed the boy the door.

As a child, Danita’s quiet nature caused adults around her to wonder whether something was wrong. Later, Danita was diagnosed with attention deficit (hyperactivity) disorder. From the outset Danita’s mother, Dianne BigEagle, did not believe that anything was wrong with Danita and did not want her to take prescription medication. Yet after Danita saw seven specialists, Dianne conceded to the so-called experts and Danita began taking Ritalin. Doctors kept Danita and Dianne in the dark regarding important matters such as the amount of time Danita would need to take Ritalin and methods to get off it.

Danita’s personality changed immediately after going on the medication; she became focused, outgoing and her school grades improved significantly. But not all of the effects of this medication were positive. As she got older, Danita began to express feelings of hopelessness regarding her use of Ritalin. Dianne says Danita “started to change at about 17. She didn’t want to be dependent on the stuff. She said, ‘I could never be this or I could never be that because they’re going to say I’m a drug addict because of these pills.’” Although doctors reassured Dianne that her daughter would have no problems detoxifying, that was not the case. Danita told her mother that she could not live without Ritalin. Dianne is sure that Ritalin is “what turned [Danita] into a drug addict.”

As a youth, Danita encountered other obstacles. Her mother and father separated and her time was split between both parents. Danita was placed in Marival School, one which operated similarly to a residential school, but was quickly withdrawn from the institution by her mother, herself having attended residential school for eight years. At age 17, Danita began to date a boyfriend who was abusive towards her. Dianne believes that their relationship was unhealthy, due in large part to the fact that Danita's boyfriend was also on Ritalin.

Danita had her first child, a daughter named Cassidy, at 18. She was excited about the pregnancy and formed a bond with her daughter immediately. Although she was struggling with alcohol and drug use, Danita tried very hard to beat these addictions during her pregnancy. Once born, Cassidy became Danita's passion. Although she was still battling addictions, Danita was determined to go back to school and find a place where she could build a home for herself and Cassidy. When Danita was a child and her parents were drinking, her grandmother, who was one of her greatest teachers, would reassure Danita that her parents "will not always be like this." In the same caring and hopeful manner, Danita would tell her little girl, "I won't always be like this." In an attempt to keep her promise, Danita was in and out of treatment centers trying to get better.

Dianne last saw Danita on Friday, February 9, 2007. Dianne was the caretaker to Cassidy and son Talon while Danita fought drug and alcohol addictions. Danita was supposed to visit the following Monday and Dianne was disappointed when Danita did not show up. Dianne checked all of her daughter's usual hangouts and spoke to her peers but no one had seen Danita. Usually Danita would contact her mother when she was away from home and if not, Dianne would be able to locate Danita with relative ease. This time was different.

Dianne's next move was to phone the police. Police gave Dianne what she calls "a rough time" during this conversation. Dianne told the officer more than once that she thought her daughter was missing, but police did not immediately release any information. Finally, the officer told Dianne that Danita was not at the police station and suggested Dianne check the area hospitals. Dianne then "turned the city upside down looking for her."

Dianne reported Danita missing to the Regina Police Service on February 14, 2007. No immediate action was taken. Rather, police told Dianne that it was likely Danita was out partying and that Dianne would find her daughter before they would. It was very clear that they did not believe that Danita was missing. At this point, Dianne was forced to take matters into her own hands and she combed the town



Cassidy, Danita's daughter

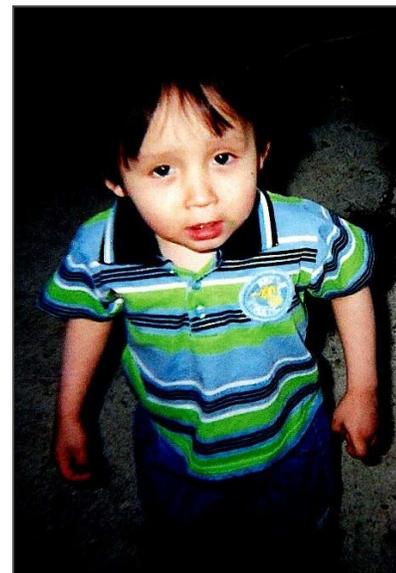
speaking to as many people as possible. Two weeks went by before Dianne, fed up with police inaction, marched down to the station and demanded that something be done to locate Danita. Dianne had to convince police officers that Danita really was missing by citing bizarre occurrences, such as Danita not returning home to change, eat or pick up her money. Nothing added up for Dianne. The police responded, "Give us some time or give us a place to look." Dianne replied, "I think I'm doing your job."

Through personal investigation, Dianne discovered that Danita has been seen at least three times since February 11, 2007. The first sighting was in Winnipeg where a man and woman said that Danita was at the Manwin Hotel for a couple of days, just one week before Dianne arrived in the city to search for her daughter. Danita introduced herself by the name "Tania Duck." When Dianne thought back to the use of the alias, she recalled that Danita liked the name "Tania" and that Danita's father's nickname is John "Duck." Another two women from Broadview, Saskatchewan, say that they met Danita at the Manwin Hotel and she introduced herself as Danita BigEagle. They did not think anything of the meeting until they saw Danita's missing person poster at a gas station. Danita was last seen at the Coachman Hotel in Regina. While these tips are encouraging, they take their toll on Dianne who feels the need to personally follow up on each and every one. Equally trying are false reports or rumours that circulate in communities that Danita has been found. When Danita's missing person posters are taken down, searching is made more difficult for the family and everyone else involved. The search is still on.

Unable to rely on the institution mandated to help, Dianne looked to her own people for support: the Chief of her community, a medicine man and herself. Dianne phoned Chief Connie BigEagle to ask for help and let her know that the police did not believe that Danita was missing. The Chief was aware of Danita's disappearance and immediately began to collect relevant information from Dianne regarding Danita's last known whereabouts and the responses Dianne received from police. The Chief took the matter very seriously.

Danita's father Doug is sick over his daughter's disappearance. He went to see a medicine man, or healer, who reassured him that Danita is fine. The medicine man could see Danita and he said that she will eventually come home.

More than anything Dianne trusts her instincts as Danita's mother. When she was searching for Danita, Dianne could feel how close or distant she was to her daughter at different times. For example, when



Danita's son Talon



Dianne went to Winnipeg she could sense that Danita was nearby but by the fourth day in the city, she knew that Danita was not there anymore. Dianne is occasionally overcome with a feeling of desperation and she thinks Danita is feeling the same thing; it feels like Danita is stuck in something she cannot get out of, like she is caged. But above all, Dianne's instincts tell her that Danita is going to come home.



Danita BigEagle is still missing



## **“Close in our hearts”: Debbie Sloss’s Story**

Deborah Anne Sloss, known to most as Debbie, was born on May 3, 1955 in Espanola, Ontario. She has two children, Laura and Len Jr., one granddaughter, Taylor, and nine siblings, John, Charlene (deceased as an infant), Mary Lou, Kathy, Tim, Roxanne, Sue, David and Daryl.

Debbie was placed in the Creator’s hands in 1997. Her family believes that the Toronto Police Service mishandled the investigation into her death. While police maintain that Debbie died from a drug overdose, her autopsy report shows no anatomical or toxicological cause of death. Citing this, and other unexplained circumstances, Debbie’s family believes that Debbie was murdered. They are calling on the responsible parties, especially the Toronto Police Service, to answer their questions.

At the time of her birth Debbie’s mother, Shirley (Sloss) Lascelles was living in Spanish, Ontario. She was taken by ambulance to Espanola where Debbie was born, a beautiful Ojibway baby with Mi’kmaq, Lakota and French heritage. Shortly thereafter the family, at that time comprised of Shirley, her husband (and Debbie’s legal Father) Albert and her older siblings John and Mary Lou moved to Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario. Debbie was a joyful, pretty girl and the family was very happy about her birth. Debbie and her older sister Mary Lou were just over one year apart and their mother would dress them alike. People often mistook the girls for twins.

As sisters close in age, Debbie and Mary Lou had a lot in common. They spent all their time together and shared a very special bond. When the girls were two or three years old, they used to “save” going to the bathroom so that they could go together. The two tots would squeeze onto the seat together, their bottoms vying for space on the bowl. Mary Lou learned later in life that she and Debbie had a different father than the rest of their siblings. Shirley met the girls’ biological father in residential school but was forbidden to marry him since having a Native husband was frowned upon at that time.

Mary Lou describes Debbie as a Taurus who “was just living according to her sign.” Mary Lou recalls Debbie being hit with a ruler by nuns when she was in grade one at St. Anne’s Catholic School in Sault Ste. Marie. Debbie sat still while being strapped and though her hand turned red she stubbornly refused to move it. Debbie was also a

cup-thrower; in arguments with her siblings, mainly her oldest brother John, Debbie was determined to get her point across and as a result cups would fly across the room. Mary Lou abstained from this behaviour since she was not a cup-thrower and she did not want to get in trouble with her mother (but this did not bother Debbie). An occasional rebel, Debbie sometimes skipped classes in high school. Mary Lou fondly remembers, “Debbie was just Debbie. She was stubborn and wouldn’t walk in the line that they tell you to walk in.”

Debbie’s early childhood was spent in Batchawana Bay located 70 kilometers north of Sault Ste. Marie. Always fun to be around, Debbie was an active member of her community. Debbie loved helping with community events such as potluck dinners, bingos, dances at the community hall and bonfires at the beach. Even after her family relocated to Toronto, Debbie still found ways to help Batchawana Bay community members. When Batchawana Bay’s priest was transferred to a church in Toronto, Debbie was more than happy to do what she could to facilitate the transition. Along with the rest of her family, she helped the priest look for a house and get set up in his new community.

When Debbie was a teen her family moved to Toronto. As she grew older, Debbie took on more responsibility for her family. Debbie’s mother was sick and had seven children to look after, so Debbie and Mary Lou assumed the roles of caregivers to their siblings. The girls would sometimes alternate between preparing meals and washing the dishes, but Mary Lou did most of the cooking. Their younger sister Kathy always dried the dishes. They also alternated housecleaning duties and clever Debbie adopted her older sister’s trick of cleaning the house a couple of days before asking her mother’s permission to go out with friends.

In high school Debbie enrolled in an arts and sciences stream. She spent a lot of time creating artwork and Shirley taught Debbie and Mary Lou to crochet items like blankets, vests and sweaters. Mary Lou remembers that she and Debbie spent most of their teen years crocheting. Their mother liked to keep her children close to home where she knew they would be safe, so the teens were allowed to invite their friends over to play records and dance.

Debbie became more independent when, at about 14 years old, she began to work as a waitress at a restaurant named Ted’s. She enjoyed the freedom of earning her own money and would spend a lot of time shopping for clothes in department stores with Mary Lou. The girls also decided to venture into “interior design” with part of their



*June/89  
I like this one the best.  
Take care My  
Baby Girl  
Love You Forever  
Mom.  
xxxooo*

paycheques. After they got the go-ahead from their mother, Debbie and Mary Lou painted the bedroom they shared purple and turquoise and papered one wall with large flowers of the same colours. The girls just loved it!

Debbie graduated high school and later earned a certificate in bookkeeping. When Debbie was about 17 years old, she began to date Len, a young man who worked at the gas station across the street from her house. The two married and when Debbie was 18 she gave birth to her first child, a daughter she named Laura. Debbie was a very doting mother. The entire family loved Laura and gave her plenty of attention as she was the second grandchild to Shirley and first niece for all.

Shortly after her marriage and the birth of her first child, Debbie began to change. Once having an easy sense of humour and light outlook on life, Debbie became serious. Mary Lou speculates that this change may have been due, in part, to an increasing number of arguments between Debbie and her mother. As a teenager, Debbie argued with her mother over matters like her curfew. The arguments continued as Debbie got older. Mary Lou thinks Shirley saw some of her younger self in Debbie, which is why the two clashed. Debbie, Len and Laura moved to Heyden, Ontario for two years then settled in Goulais River, Ontario, where Laura still resides. At 21 years old Debbie had her second child, Len Jr.

While they later divorced, Len still smiles as he remembers what a great mother Debbie was. Debbie and Laura were very close during Laura's childhood. Laura remembers being hospitalized with bronchial pneumonia at age five and how hard she and Debbie cried when they had to be separated overnight. After a few days, doctors had to ask Debbie to stop visiting Laura at the hospital because the stress and heartache of her mother's departure each night was hampering Laura's recovery. While they were forced apart, Laura says, "we were close in our hearts." Although his parents' divorce took its toll on Len Jr., he grew close to his mother in his teenage years. Len Jr. is still healing from his mother's death and Laura believes the entire family would be further along in their healing journeys if they received answers to questions about the circumstances of Debbie's passing.

In 1979, Debbie was in a serious car accident with Len, Laura, Len Jr. and her sister Roxanne. In the aftermath of the crash, Debbie was pinned under a truck by her arm and leg. While Debbie was stuck, she feared her loved ones might be severely injured or worse. This anxiety affected her for years to come. Laura thinks Debbie



Debbie on her wedding day with Albert Sloss



developed post-traumatic stress disorder as a result of the accident but that it went undiagnosed since less was known about the disorder at the time. All of Debbie's family noticed changes in Debbie following the accident. To cope with the trauma and anxiety Debbie turned to alcohol. Laura believes that her mother's life could have turned out differently if she had the proper treatment for this disorder.

After Debbie and Len divorced, Laura and Len Jr. stayed with their father. Debbie took advantage of a promotion offered by a bus company and bought a ticket that took her across Canada where she visited family and friends. While in Edmonton, Debbie raved to Laura about the grandeur of the West Edmonton Mall. Finally, Debbie returned to Toronto. Her family hoped that being close to her sisters Mary Lou and Kathy would help Debbie deal with her alcohol problems. However, it took some time before Debbie was able to overcome her alcoholism. Upon her arrival, Debbie linked up with a group of street people. The family says that some of Debbie's friends also had addictions, which fed Debbie's alcoholism. Still these friendships were very important to Debbie, who once referred to the crowd as "her family;" Debbie sometimes felt like an outsider in her own family because of her struggle with addictions. After her death many of Debbie's street friends attended the feast in honour of her life.

In the last year of her life Debbie became more optimistic. She was determined to quit using alcohol and drugs, reconcile with her ex-husband and regain her family. Debbie was taking advantage of services offered by the Elizabeth Fry Society. She began her path to recovery and was sober for five months. Even though Debbie and Laura were separated by distance, the two kept in touch and made it a habit to talk on the phone every Sunday. Mary Lou and her husband Dan Smoke had begun to teach Debbie words and their meanings in Ojibway. Debbie accompanied Mary Lou and Dan to listen to Elders and to learn more about her traditions.

Debbie's body was found in her Toronto apartment in July 1997. Laura had been worried about her mother for a while since Debbie had stopped answering Laura's Sunday phone calls. Debbie's birthday came and went without any sign of her. Not knowing what else to do Laura continued to call her mother but received no response. Laura also tried to call Milton, Debbie's boyfriend at the time, but he refused to speak to her. The family never imagined that anything had happened to Debbie, so no one thought it necessary to file a missing persons report. On July 29, the building's landlords found Debbie's decomposed body in her apartment. No one knew



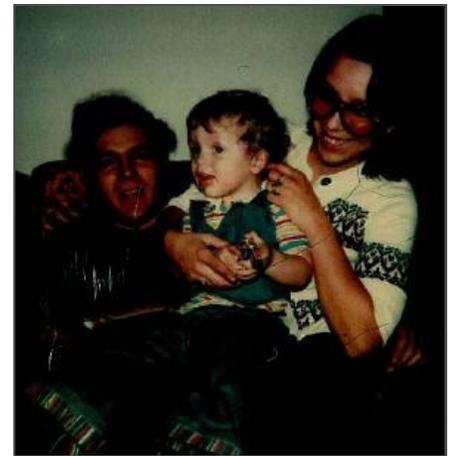
Debbie in Kirkland Lake, Ontario

how long she had been there and the exact date of her passing is still unknown. Debbie had recently turned 42 years old. Despite the following problems with the investigation, the police stopped working on Debbie's case only two days after her body was found.

The family recalls that Debbie was named a "Jane Doe" and her body lay unidentified in the morgue for almost a month. The police did not contact Laura or any of Debbie's relatives, but the sad news reached the family by "moccasin telegraph" when a relative from Batchawana Bay overheard it on the street in Toronto. The fact that Debbie had passed then spread by word-of-mouth to each family member. The Toronto Police Service told Sue, Debbie's sister, that Debbie died of a drug overdose. They also told Kathy that "Debbie liked to party too much!" Debbie's family has raised serious concerns about the quality of the police response to Debbie's death. Noting that the police report describes Debbie as a "Native Indian" and known "alcoholic and crack addict," the family believes that police officers made judgments about Debbie based on preconceived notions and stereotypes and that these assumptions hindered the investigation into her death. Laura believes, "they just passed her off as another dead Indian, so to speak... She was still loved."

Laura and Mary Lou recount a series of suspicious circumstances surrounding Debbie's death. These discrepancies have still not been investigated. First, police told the family that Debbie's death was the result of a drug overdose. If this was the case then something in Debbie's body had to have given way, but no specific cause of death was ever reported. The family later learned from the coroner's report that there was no sign of alcohol or drugs in Debbie's system (the coroner did not examine her stomach or liver contents). Second, police reported that there was feces spread all over the walls of Debbie's apartment, an incident strange in itself, but completely illogical when combined with the fact that Debbie was a very clean person. Third, police had secured the area with yellow tape and Debbie belongings were held for two days, but by the time the family got to Debbie's apartment, the landlords had given away all of her possessions and rented the space to a new tenant. While the belongings could never take the place of the wonderful woman, Laura was looking forward to Debbie's promise of an heirloom sapphire and diamond ring for her birthday.

Furthermore, Laura recounts a conversation she had with Milton that she felt sent up a red flag. Debbie and Milton had been together for about eight years, so Laura contacted him to ask if he had anything that belonged to her mom, even a sweater, that she could have. Milton responded, "I want nothing to do with it." What, Laura



Debbie with Len and her son, Len Jr.



wonders, did Milton mean by “it?” Milton has since passed on so Debbie’s family cannot ask him what he meant by this statement. Although Mary Lou had a positive relationship with Milton, Laura thinks that Milton’s apparent lack of interest in Debbie’s death is suspicious.

Additionally, Laura has found many inconsistencies in the police and coroner reports concerning her mother’s death. Many of these discrepancies seem like they could have easily been avoided. For example, the Coroner’s Investigation Statement got Debbie’s date of birth wrong and states she was found on her back, while the police report states that she was found lying on her left side. One report says that a cheque was found on Debbie’s apartment floor; however another report states that the cheque was found on her table. Laura also relates how the police report states the landlord saw Debbie on July 23rd and thought she looked unhealthy, but the coroner reported that Debbie was well nourished. The office that misreported Debbie’s birth date also presumed Debbie died four days before her body was found; Laura thinks it is unlikely that the decomposition of Debbie’s body could have occurred in such a short time. Finally and perhaps most disturbingly to Laura, the copy of the police report Laura obtained more than five years after her mother’s death did not include any of the information investigating detectives told Laura around the time of the incident.

Laura has so many unanswered questions. Why was the information in the police and coroner reports never explained to her family? Why are there numerous unexplained inconsistencies in these reports? Why were they never addressed and corrected? And most importantly, what *really* happened to her mother? The family feels like Debbie’s death was just brushed under a carpet from every direction. Her family, however, refuses to be brushed aside.

Debbie’s brother-in-law and Elder Dan Smoke tells the story of Dudley George’s brother Sam and his powerful statement, “I want the truth” in regards to Dudley’s death at Ipperwash. With the help of an Elder, Sam’s steadfast determination to achieve the debwewin (truth) brought healing for all those concerned and as a result Dudley’s life will never be forgotten.

“I want answers,” Laura says. Like Dudley George’s brother, Laura wants the truth. She wants someone to be held accountable, particularly for the police to admit that they mishandled the investigation into Debbie’s death. She wants to be able to tell her daughter Taylor why she does not have her grandmother to help guide her through life. She does not want another family to have to



endure this kind of pain. Laura continues to press for answers to the question of what happened to her mother and to search for someone to assume responsibility. Until that day arrives, Debbie will be remembered as a proud grandmother, a loving mom and a young girl who loved purple and turquoise flowers.





## **Remembered on Standing Buffalo: Delores Whiteman's Story**

Delores "Lolly" Marie Whiteman was born on May 12, 1945, on the Standing Buffalo Dakota First Nation in Saskatchewan. Her family members have not seen or heard from her since the early 1980s. Delores's daughter Laura has been searching for her mother since the late 1980s, but has yet to find any answers.

Delores is the only child of Lena Whiteman, a single mother who died of tuberculosis when Delores was only two years old. After her mother's death, Delores lived with different relatives on the reserve where poverty, violence and alcoholism were common.

Despite these hardships, Delores searched for happiness in her life. Family and friends recall that Delores was always smiling, had a great sense of humour and was the life of the party. As a youth, Delores attended Lebret Indian Residential School, where she escaped the violence and alcoholism of the reserve. However, Lebret was not a place where Delores would have found the nurturing and guidance she needed to fulfill her dreams of becoming a nurse or working with children. Her experiences in residential school may have contributed to her decision to leave the reserve in 1962.

Around this time Delores became pregnant with her daughter, Laura. She delivered her in the Grey Nuns' Hospital in Regina. It must have been a difficult delivery, as the doctor had to use forceps. Delores kept Laura for almost one year, not much less time than she spent with her own mother as an infant. Delores was living in an apartment in downtown Regina when she had a visit from her grandfather, Paul Whiteman and his wife, Amelia Episkinew. They told Delores that they would keep the baby. They asked her to wait and said they would come back for Laura. When Delores's grandparents returned after a few days the apartment was empty and both Delores and Laura were gone without a trace. Laura was placed in foster care at this time. This was during the era known as the "60s Scoop," when it was not uncommon for "Indian" children to be removed in order to be placed with "white" families.

Very little information is known about Delores's life after she left Regina. Some family members recalled hearing rumours that Delores left for Edmonton, Vancouver or Toronto. Some even said they heard



she went to the Northwest Territories. Other relatives reported that she had stayed in touch, writing letters postmarked from Edmonton in the late 1960s. She also visited her cousin on Piapot First Nation in 1963 or 1964. The cousin remembers Delores's visit with her new baby, Laura.

Although it was thought she was using another name, no one remembered what the name was. Relatives who lived in Vancouver reported that Delores had been visiting them and in fact left one of the old ladies, Mrs. Redman, with a photograph of herself and three children. When Laura spoke to the family, they remembered that she told them she was with a man and was visiting "from California." That photograph depicted Delores with two Caucasian children and a small baby that appeared to be First Nations. One other relative has consistently stated he remembers hearing that she went to the Seattle area.

In 1987, Delores's daughter Laura returned to Standing Buffalo Dakota First Nation after discovering this was her home community. After speaking to relatives and community members, Laura began to realize that her mother had not been seen or heard from in a very long time. In fact, many on the reserve seemed to have forgotten about her. Determined to locate her mother, Laura began to search phonebooks and the internet, placing thousands of calls across North America in search of her mother. She continued to talk to relatives and community members to gather some information about Delores's life and disappearance. After several years of futile searching, Laura contacted police and attempted to file a missing persons report and to place a missing search with the Salvation Army. However, she was told repeatedly that as an adoptee she could neither file the missing persons report nor have access to information about her mother. She was told that because her adoption was a legal one, she was no longer considered to be "her daughter."

In 1995, in response to these barriers, Laura asked Chief Mel Isnana to file a missing persons report in Regina. He agreed to do so without hesitation, yet it appears police still refused to take Delores's disappearance seriously. There was no progress on Delores Whiteman's case from 1995 to 2005, as police maintained that there was no substance to Delores's case and therefore no reason to conduct a search.

Police inaction has forced Laura to conduct her own investigation, speaking to relatives, conducting private and online searches and pressing for a thorough investigation. In 2005, after the Robert Pickton case broke in Port Coquitlam and the Downtown Eastside,



Laura contacted the Missing Persons Task Force to report her mother as a possible victim. Having known that she was in Vancouver and having heard speculation that she may have been working on the streets, Laura felt compelled to make this report. RCMP contacted Laura and had DNA taken to do a cross-check on the remains. Nothing was found and the RCMP felt that their thorough investigation turned up nothing that indicated Delores was missing or in harm. In fact, there was no information that could be found on Delores except that she was last seen and “seemed to be doing okay” when she was at the police station in Edmonton in 1987. This was a new piece of information for Laura and in following up on this information she discovered that the file had never been investigated in Regina when it was filed in 1995. Instead, it had been immediately transferred to Edmonton where it sat until 2005 when the Vancouver Missing Women’s Task Force requested it. When the file was returned to Edmonton, Laura contacted the Edmonton police only to learn that key information in the file is either missing or has been destroyed.

Like piecing together a puzzle, Laura began to collect information about her mother’s life and the circumstances leading up to her disappearance. Although many of the police officers she spoke to claimed that they did not have a reason to search for Delores and believed that she did not want to be found, Laura feels that this is not the case. In one instance an investigator asked Laura, “Why are you looking? What, exactly, is it you hope to get out of this meeting?” As Laura says, “no matter how bad things are you always want to go back...home.” Laura has received support in posting her mother’s information with the Vancouver Missing Women’s website, where Delores’s photograph and information is part of the collage of faces of missing women and the Doe Network. As well, many relatives and friends have searched for “Lolly,” but without any new information or leads it is difficult to know where to look.

Despite this, Laura continues to search and continues to wait for answers. She often attends traditional ceremonies, smudges and prays to discover the truth about what happened to Delores. She still believes that one day the answers will come and that is why she will never stop searching.





## **Georgina Faith Papin's Story**

Georgina Faith Papin is remembered by her friends and family as a caring mother, sister and friend. A talented artist and writer, Georgina was the mother of seven beautiful children. She is described as a warm and funny woman who could talk to anyone,

the sort of person who made friends wherever she went. Georgina took deep pride in her identity as a Cree woman. Traditional dancing, songs, art and teachings had an important place in her life. Georgina will be forever missed and remembered by the many people who loved her.

Georgina was born on March 11, 1964 in Edmonton, Alberta. A member of the Enoch Cree Nation, Georgina's father was from Enoch and her mother was from the Ermineskin Cree Nation. Georgina came from a large family. She was the fourth of nine children. Her mother, Alice, was a residential school Survivor and she suffered from addictions as well as several illnesses, including cancer. Georgina's father, George, was in and out of jail so her grandparents played an important role in her early life and the lives of her siblings. Georgina's grandfather was well-known baseball player, James Rattlesnake. Her paternal grandmother was a tiny woman and the two just "fit" together. Georgina's older sisters had a special relationship with their maternal grandmother. Both girls stayed with her until she died suddenly in a car accident shortly after Georgina was born. Throughout the 1960s and 1970s all of the children, Debbie, Cynthia, Richard, Georgina, George, Tammy, Randall, Elana and Bonnie, were taken from their parents and placed in the child welfare system.

Georgina was only a year old when she and her older siblings were removed from their home. Georgina was placed in a foster home with her older brother but her sisters, Debbie and Cynthia, were sent to residential school in Hobbema. It was the very same residential school their mother had attended. For the next eleven years Georgina and her brother were shuffled between foster and group homes. Although Georgina did not like to talk about her childhood, the family firmly believes she suffered abuse and neglect. When she was 12, Georgina ran away and found herself on the streets of Calgary. Like so many isolated and vulnerable youth she became involved in a gang. At age 14 she moved to Las Vegas, Nevada. She began working in the sex trade to support herself.



Georgina moved frequently, living in Las Vegas, Edmonton, Fort Saskatchewan, Mission, and finally, Vancouver's Downtown Eastside. She also spent time in prison. In prison, Georgina was very involved in the Native Sisterhood and actively encouraged other Native women to get involved as well. She participated in sweats, learned traditional teachings, songs and beadwork. After leaving the Burnaby Correctional Centre for Women in 1996, Georgina became involved with the BC Friendship Centre, reclaiming more of her culture as a Cree woman. Georgina and her siblings have all lost their language but Georgina knew some songs and knew how to dance. She loved to make traditional outfits, as well as dreamcatchers and moccasins.

Georgina was the mother of seven beautiful children. Her first daughter, Kristina, was born in Las Vegas. Her second daughter, Leslie Ann, was born in Edmonton. Stuart, Dylan Sky and Autumn Wind were born in BC, as were her twins, Winter Star and Little Storm. Georgina loved her children deeply but she struggled to find her place in the world. More than anything she wanted her children to have the opportunities and chances she did not. Having escaped to the streets at 12 years old she had only a grade six education and most of her teenage years were spent on the fast-paced streets of Las Vegas. Georgina carried the trauma of being removed from her home as an infant, of growing up in foster care, group homes and the streets, of missing her family and community. She carried the pain of addiction, prostitution and violence and of losing her eldest sister Debbie, who passed away suddenly in 1988. But it was losing her children that hurt Georgina the most. When she lost her children, she lost a piece of herself. "But she never gave up on them," say her sisters. "She would have picked herself up again and got her children back." Unfortunately, she never got the chance. In March 1999, Georgina disappeared from the Downtown Eastside and her younger sister Bonnie reported her missing to the Vancouver Police Department later that year.

Three years later, in July 2002, Georgina's remains were found on Robert Pickton's Port Coquitlam farm. Georgina was 34 years old at the time of her disappearance. She was the mother of seven children, a cherished sister and friend. Georgina was a joyful woman who could play guitar and sing. She was a woman who carried herself with humour, pride and tremendous inner strength. Her favourite colour was red and she loved to make bannock. She was a ball of fire with a heart of gold. She made people feel safe. These are the things friends and family members remember about Georgina.



Robert Pickton would eventually be convicted of six counts of second-degree murder, including the murder of Georgina Papin (see Update on page 49). Three of Georgina's sisters, Cynthia, Elana and Bonnie, were present for much of the trial and prayed together before entering the courtroom. They thought about their surviving brothers and sisters who were not able to be there, but who were with them in spirit. They tried as best they could to prepare themselves but how, they ask, can you truly prepare yourself for something as horrifying as the Pickton trial? The horror of the trial, of learning how their sister suffered, was compounded by a lack of emotional and financial supports. As Georgina's siblings they felt they had the right to observe the entire trial, but without financial support they simply could not afford to stay. The trial lasted for more than ten months, and safe and affordable accommodation was virtually impossible to find. They spent over \$300 in taxi fare trying to find somewhere to stay in Vancouver. Georgina's sisters say they have received little substantive support from their extended families or communities and none from their respective bands. Cynthia says she was told outright that because she was "Bill C-31" she was not entitled to band assistance. They believe there needs to be more support for the families of missing and murdered women, particularly financial resources and access to counselling. However, after everything they have gone through they say it can be hard to know who to trust.

Georgina's sisters were interviewed by the media before and during the trial. They were treated with respect by journalists during interviews, but were disgusted by the way Georgina and the other missing and murdered women from the Downtown Eastside were portrayed in the media. When they approached the media about their concerns, they were told "this is how we sell newspapers and make the news." After that, some of Georgina's siblings stopped talking to the media all together. In addition to hurtful and sensationalized reporting, the families of the missing and murdered women have had to endure cruel "jokes" in the media like, "I'll have eggs with a side of dead hooker." Also devastating was the 2002 PETA (People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals) anti-meat campaign that appeared to exploit the murders of the women from the Downtown Eastside. Georgina's family had to learn not to take the stories personally, but the comments still hurt. They simply cannot comprehend how anyone could be so cold-hearted, so malicious. "I wouldn't want to be remembered like that," they say.

Some of Georgina's siblings have experienced nightmares; others say they simply do not know how to begin to deal with what happened to their sister, let alone move past it. Their anger is palpable, not only towards Robert Pickton but towards those who should have known,



and perhaps did know, what was going on at Pickton's farm. They do not believe justice has occurred. Georgina's sisters believe that other people were involved in the murders, or at the very least knew what was happening on the Pickton farm and these people have not been punished. The first trial is over, but Georgina's siblings do not feel as though there has been justice for their sister or for any of the murdered and missing women. Georgina's family is also angry at the Vancouver Police Department. They have so many questions, *but mainly*: why did police not respond sooner to the reports of missing women?

In October 2002, Georgina's siblings held a memorial and feast for their sister on the Enoch First Nation. It was an emotional occasion, but also a reunion. Georgina's eldest daughter traveled from Las Vegas to attend the memorial and one of her younger brothers came from New York State. Georgina's sisters say that after decades of separation, the siblings are more connected than they have ever been. It has been a long and difficult journey. Separated by distance and circumstance, Georgina's brothers and sisters do their best to care for each another. They point out, however, that it is hard to support one another when they are all going through the same trauma. Still they are fiercely loyal and after being separated as children are grateful to have found each other. Bonnie remembers vividly the day Georgina contacted her. She was 12 years old, living in British Columbia. "Georgina let me know that she was my sister and told me that we had other brothers and sisters in Edmonton. I remember Georgina's voice like she was here and it was so warm and friendly," says Bonnie. "She made me feel loved and that I belonged somewhere. It was the best feeling ever."

Georgina's siblings say they feel robbed. They did not get to spend enough time with their sister. There were so many things left to share. They miss their sister. They miss her smile and her energy. And more than anything, they want us to know Georgina for who she truly was: mother to seven children, a beloved sister, an aunt, a niece and a dear friend to many. They will always love you, Georgina.

*This story is based on interviews with some of Georgina's siblings. They encourage other family members to share their stories as well.*



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**Update:**

In January 2008, the Crown filed an appeal arguing that the trial judge erred in splitting Pickton's 26 first-degree murder charges into two trials. The defense also filed an appeal, alleging errors by the trial judge. The appeal began in March 2009. BC's Attorney General has said that if the defense loses its appeal and the convictions stand, the Crown will not proceed with the remaining 20 first-degree murder charges Pickton currently faces.





## **A Short Life of a Sweetheart: Nina Courtepatte's Story**

Nina Louise Courtepatte is remembered as a beautiful girl with a passion for movies, music and dancing. She was a gifted artist, with a special talent for drawing and writing. Nina wanted to be famous and dreamed about becoming a model and actress. Shortly before her death, she was the winner of a local modelling contest. On April 3, 2005, Nina was brutally raped and murdered on a golf course outside of Edmonton. Five people have been tried in connection with her murder. Nina will be forever cherished by her mother Peacha, her father Tim, Darcy, Annie, Patrick, Eathan, family and friends.

Nina was born on October 3, 1991, in Edmonton, Alberta. Born with long, thick, dark hair, Nina was a very happy and inquisitive infant. She brought much joy to her family. She was very curious and her mother, Peacha Atkinson, laughingly recalls how Nina would try to chew on practically everything. She attended Aboriginal Headstart, an early childhood development program for Aboriginal children and their families.

As she grew Nina became more vocal and outspoken. Her parents encouraged her to use her voice. They taught her about safety and about standing up for herself. Peacha believes these early teachings had a strong influence on Nina, who was very compassionate. She liked to take care of people. Nina did her best to support and encourage classmates who were being picked on, telling them that they were beautiful and that they had inner strength. She was not afraid to challenge people; if she thought a teacher was wrong, she would stand up and refuse to sit down until they acknowledged their mistake. In grade six, Nina participated in the D.A.R.E. program (Drug Abuse Resistance Education). Peacha remembers watching bemusedly as Nina reprimanded a stranger she caught smoking next to a no-smoking sign.

When Nina was eight the family moved to the Dunluce area of Edmonton and Peacha recounts a series of bad experiences that occurred during their time there. It started when Nina realized that she could scare her mother by hiding outside after dark. The behaviour escalated. Not understanding the significance or consequences of her words, Nina began to tell people that she was

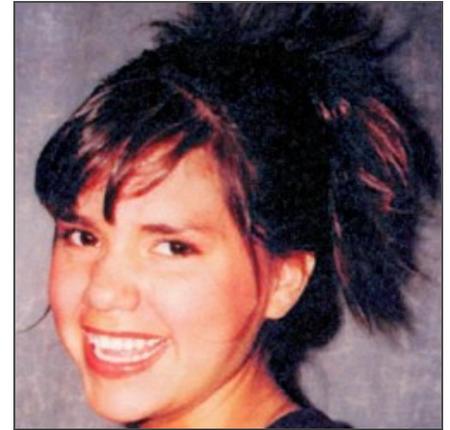


being abused. Peacha and her husband tried to address Nina's behaviour, but it was too late. Child and Family Service workers were called. Nina was never removed from the home, as child welfare workers found nothing to confirm the allegations. The family later moved to the west end of Edmonton and after that Peacha says that Nina was much happier and her behaviour really improved.

Family was important to Nina and she had many close relationships. The fourth of six siblings, Nina was very protective of her younger brother and sister. She would not let any harm come to them. As a child she liked to tell them stories and would dress them up using make-up and nail polish. When she was older she liked to make pancakes and eggs for her family on weekends. Nina had a very special relationship with her older brother Patrick. Apart from her diary, Patrick was the one that Nina confided in the most. He was the one she went to when she needed to talk. Nina was also very attached to her mother. Peacha was learning Cree and as she learned new words and phrases she would teach them to Nina.

Nina had a very vivid imagination and as a child her passion for drama led her to write and act out her own performances. She was involved with the Boys and Girls Club of Edmonton and acted in many of their plays. She loved shows like *American Idol*, *Canadian Idol* and *America's Next Top Model*. Despite her young age, Nina was absolutely determined to realize her dreams and begged her mother to contact modeling and acting agencies in Edmonton. If for some reason Peacha did not phone when she said she would, Nina would make the call herself! She was always looking for ways to make her dreams come true. Nina was rewarded for her determination when in the summer of 2004 she won a local modelling contest and was invited to enroll in Chan International's professional modelling program.

Nina was a popular and social girl. She made friends very fast. Peacha notes that Nina, like many youth, tried to challenge the rules. However, she also emphasizes that Nina always called home when she was supposed to and always came home when she said she would. On March 30, 2005, Nina said she would like to spend the weekend at a friend's house. This was not unusual. The girls had been friends for years and were practically inseparable. A few days later Peacha got a phone call from the friend's mother. She asked to speak to her daughter, saying that the girls had told her they were staying at Nina's house. It was then that Peacha learned Nina's friend had developed a pattern of running away for three or four days at a time. Her mother tried to stop her without any success. The friend's mother told Peacha not to worry, that the girls would certainly come



Nina modelling



home in couple of days. But Peacha was worried. She phoned Nina's friends, she called the youth shelter and the *iHuman Youth Society*; she called every organization she could think of. Despite being deeply concerned, Peacha fully expected that the girls would return home in a day or two. Given her previous experiences with Child and Family Services, it is not without surprise that Peacha did not call the police.

Two days later, Peacha learned that the body of a girl Nina's age had been found on the Edmonton Springs Golf Course. She immediately contacted the Edmonton Police Service (EPS). The police asked a series of difficult questions: "Did she have a habit?" "Did she drink?" "Had she 'run away' before?" They also asked for a picture of Nina. When they came back the next day, Peacha knew it was Nina. She was only 13 years old.

Five people—two adults and three youths—were tried in connection with Nina's murder. One of the adults, Michael Briscoe, was initially acquitted of all charges. The Crown appealed this decision and in 2008, the Alberta Court of Appeal found that Justice Brian Burrows had erred in his judgment and ordered a retrial. Joseph Laboucan, the other adult charged, was convicted of first-degree murder and sentenced to life in prison. Laboucan appealed in June 2008, but the conviction was upheld. Peacha is lobbying to have Laboucan declared a dangerous offender. Despite his life sentence Laboucan is still eligible to apply for the so-called "faint hope clause," and Peacha intends to do anything she can to block his application (see Update on page 56).

Of the three youths, Michael Williams pleaded guilty to first-degree murder and was sentenced to life in prison with no chance of parole for 10 years. Williams was sentenced as an adult but is appealing this decision. Like with Laboucan, Peacha is lobbying to have Williams declared a dangerous offender. Stephanie Bird, another youth, was convicted of manslaughter, kidnapping and aggravated sexual assault. She was sentenced as an adult to 12 years, 9 years with time served. However, the Crown is still seeking a murder conviction and has appealed Justice Ross' decision. In August 2008, Peacha was shocked and horrified to learn that Bird had already been granted two escorted day passes allowing her to leave the correctional facility. The third youth, a young woman, was convicted of second-degree murder and aggravated sexual assault in July 2008. She was tried as a young offender and cannot be named. She is scheduled to be sentenced in March 2009.



When asked about her experiences with the criminal justice system, Peacha is very critical. She argues that sentencing should exclude time served in custody, that a prison sentence should begin on the day of sentencing. Peacha is also lobbying for changes to the Youth Criminal Justice Act so that violent offenders can be named in the media and tried and sentenced as adults, regardless of their age. Peacha believes more programs are needed for youth involved in the criminal justice system. She argues for strong intervention and points to the documentary “Scared Straight” as a potential model. Peacha says although they have been convicted, the youth are not taking responsibility for Nina’s murder. She describes one particular instance in which one of the youth waved at her in the courtroom.

Peacha wishes she could have had contact with some of the witnesses connected to the case, particularly Nina’s friend and the man who found her daughter’s body. However, by law she was not permitted to communicate with them until after the trials had concluded. Peacha understands the purpose of this, but knows that they are suffering too. She would love to sit in a circle with them. She says that not being able to talk about what happened makes it more difficult to heal, not only for her own family but for the other families involved.

Peacha describes her relationship with the police officers that investigated Nina’s murder as positive. She knows that other families have encountered discrimination, but this was not her experience. She believes Nina’s age and the brutality of her murder pressed police into immediate action. Peacha believes the officers were truly horrified by what had been done to Nina and worked overtime, sometimes without pay, to find the people responsible. A few officers went so far as to promise Peacha that Nina’s murderers would be caught and punished. It was a close relationship, with officers calling regularly to inform her of new developments. It should be noted, however, that Peacha was very assertive about her rights as Nina’s mother. Once, police released information to the media without informing her first. She called the police immediately, demanding to know why she was not notified.

Almost immediately after Nina’s death, the media reported on the family’s interactions with Child and Family Services. The grief of losing Nina was compounded by malicious reports of alleged abuse. Some reporters went so far as to insinuate that, had she been apprehended by Child and Family Services, Nina might still be alive. The family was devastated. Peacha says the media reported without knowing the truth. They did not represent the situation accurately, basing their stories on what other people said, people who were not truly connected with or authorized to speak on behalf of the family.



Mindful of this violation, she did not speak to the media for two years after Nina's murder. She has since broken her silence, but remains extremely cautious. She says reporters have tried to confuse her by rephrasing questions that she had already refused to answer, trying to get her to say what they wanted to hear. She recalls one particular incident in which a reporter wanted her to comment on a statement made by one of the offenders. Peacha said she had not heard the statement and, more importantly, that she did not want to know what had been said. The reporter responded by repeating the offender's statement to her so that she could comment on it and give the reporter his story.

In recounting her experiences, Peacha emphasizes the need for better resources for families. She stresses the need for more information about where family members can get help, financial assistance and supports for healing. She knew nothing about Victim Services and had no idea where to access the supports she needed, such as financial support to give Nina a funeral. Peacha approached her community of Onion Lake Cree Nation, but was refused financial support on the grounds that she did not live in the community and that Nina was not a status Indian. It was only when Peacha approached a funeral home to inquire about payment options that she learned she could apply for a victim's package. Although grateful for this support, the victim's package did not resolve all of the family's needs. Because the funds were limited, Peacha was forced to choose cremation over burial. And when an administrative error delayed her claim, making it impossible for her to pay for the services, the funeral home took her to small claims court and refused to release Nina until the bill was paid in full.

Money continues to be a source of anxiety. In the months following Nina's death, Peacha was not ready to return to work but worried that unless she was able to claim long-term disability she would have no choice but to go back before she was ready. Recounting this experience, Peacha says people need to recognize that grief affects everyone differently. It is often assumed that depression occurs immediately after a tragedy, but this is not always the case. In fact, it can be months or years before those affected experience depression. Peacha says employers need to acknowledge this and change their policies accordingly. Employees should be able to take time off for healing when they need it, instead of being restricted to a short period immediately after the event.

Peacha emphasizes the need for more support and understanding from members of both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities. In the days and months following Nina's murder, Peacha felt very



alone. She was the only one who sat through all four trials. Family and friends made a point of coming to the first trial, especially the sentencing, but she was the only one sitting there consistently every day, for every trial. In addition to that, not everyone was supportive. Peacha speaks of being “deserted” by certain friends and family members, of experiencing an overwhelming feeling of abandonment. There were hurtful and judgmental comments like, “Oh, if only you didn’t let her go out...” Peacha says that she sometimes feels as though she is carrying an infection that no one wants to catch. She relates how after Nina’s death she tried to find new housing. When the landlord found out who she was, she was refused.

Perhaps more than anything else, Peacha wants to help other families with similar experiences. She says after Nina’s murder, family and friends did not know how to act around her, did not know what to say. It was a lonely position to be in, made worse because what Peacha needed more than anything else was someone to talk to. What’s more, Peacha says Victim’s Services workers do not know how to deal with families that have lost someone to murder. Although Peacha received some direction from other families, she was essentially left to find her own supports. She says this information needs to be more accessible, preferably under one roof.

Peacha wishes there were more supports for families and is trying to fill this gap. She gives her phone number to other families that are on the same journey. She shares her experiences dealing with both police and the courts, advising families of their rights, trying to prepare them for the process ahead. She is frustrated, however, by the feeling that there are more resources available to offenders than to families. She says family members also need access to supports like healing circles and counselling, but these services can be expensive and not everyone can afford to pay. Peacha is advocating for better financial supports for families, resources for counselling or to attend conferences on grief and healing.

In honour of Nina, Peacha has founded the *Nina’s Dreams Trust Fund*. The fund provides scholarships for youth interested in the arts. Scholarships are available to both young women and men as Peacha believes there needs to be better recognition of the abuse and other harms experienced by boys. Through *Nina’s Dreams*, Peacha hopes to encourage other young people to pursue their dreams. Apart from her activism, Peacha is focused on her family. She has two other children to look after and it is her kids that keep her going. She also needs time to work on her own healing. After all, Peacha has a lot to do. She wants to make Nina’s dreams come true.



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**Update:**

In 2007, Michael Williams was sentenced as an adult to life in prison with no chance of parole for 10 years. Williams appealed, but the sentence was upheld.

In September 2008, Joseph Laboucan was charged with second-degree murder in the death of another woman, Ellie May Meyer. Ellie May's body was found outside Edmonton in May 2005.

In October 2008, the Alberta Court of Appeal ruled that Michael Briscoe should be retried on charges of first-degree murder, aggravated sexual assault and kidnapping. Briscoe challenged the decision and in February 2009 the Supreme Court of Canada announced that it would hear Briscoe's appeal. As of April 2009, no date had been set.

In January 2009, the Alberta Court of Appeal ordered a new trial for Joseph Laboucan on charges of first-degree murder, kidnapping and sexual assault. The Crown has appealed to Supreme Court of Canada. No date has been set for the appeal.

In February 2009, the Alberta Court of Appeal upheld Stephanie Bird's manslaughter conviction. The Crown has said it will consider appealing to the Supreme Court of Canada.





## **A Life Cut Short: Terrie Ann Martin-Dauphinais’ Story**

Terrie Ann Martin-Dauphinais was born in February 21, 1978 in Nelson, BC. She was the second of three girls. “Sherry, Terrie and Kerry,” laughs their mother, Sue Martin. When Sue remarried, Terrie’s family grew to include two step-sisters, Heather and Shauna. Born with a bright, captivating quality, Terrie was a happy and strong infant. She could hold her head up

almost from birth and was quickly nicknamed “Bobbie-a-link” because of the way she bobbed her head. Terrie was baptized in the Catholic Church. She loved animals and carried her blanket with her everywhere.

Terrie was a very inquisitive girl. She had an insatiable desire to *know*, to explore. In their infant and toddler years, Sue took her daughters to play groups, to parks and on picnics. Terrie especially liked arts and crafts and story time. Sue smiles as she recalls dancing with her girls to Janis Joplin and Roy Orbison. Terrie was also mischievous and had a habit of sucking her thumb when she was in trouble. Sue remembers taking Terrie to the park and trying, without success, to keep her little daughter from climbing the trees. “I said, ‘No Bobbie, you can’t do that.’ And Terrie goes, ‘But mom...’ And again I said, ‘No Bobbie you can’t do that.’ Well she put her hands on her hips and goes, ‘I’m leaving home.’ And she went running off!” laughs Sue. “She was such handful! She had to investigate everything. Everything and anything, she had to check it out. She was always running around.”

Terrie was only 22 months old when her sister Sherry passed away. Sherry was born with a heart defect and at nine months underwent surgery to have the hole in her heart closed. At first, everything seemed fine and after months of fear and anxiety Sue was overwhelmed with relief. Her baby was finally healthy. But on November 12, 1979, Sherry suddenly fainted. She was hospitalized, put on a special diet and seemed to improve. Then on December 5, 1979, the very day she was scheduled to be released from the hospital, Sherry went into cardiac arrest and passed away. She was barely three years old.

Terrie cherished her older sister and Sherry's death had a profound effect on her. Almost every morning until she was nine, Terrie would wake and say, "I played with Sherry last night Mom."

Terrie was a gifted girl with many talents. Sue describes how Terrie could pick up an instrument and within half an hour know how to play it. She earned straight A's in school. She was an artist and a writer and could speak French. Everything came naturally to her. But Sherry was never far from her thoughts. Terrie's dream was to become a pediatrician. She told her mother that she wanted to save children, so that no other family would suffer the way her family did when they lost Sherry.

Sue's first husband, Terrie's biological father, was an alcoholic. Sue describes him as "a nice man when he was sober," but dangerous and abusive when drunk. Sue left him when Terrie was still an infant, about a year after Sherry died. Leaving was not easy. Sue was forced more than once to take the two girls and flee in the middle of the night, praying for the chance to start over. "When her real father found us," Sue remembers, "Terrie and Kerry were petrified." She hoped Terrie was too young to remember the violence, and for a long time Sue thought she had forgotten. It was many years before Terrie revealed just how much she did remember, how much anger she had towards her birth father. Sue now recognizes the violence Terrie witnessed had a deep impact on her emotional and mental well-being. "She didn't feel safe," says Sue. "She didn't feel safe again until I married Tony."

After leaving her first husband Sue lived in Calgary. To support herself, she ran a home day-care. "I didn't work outside the home until Kerry started school," says Sue. "My children were my number one priority." She volunteered at Terrie's school and busied herself with ferrying her daughters from one extra-curricular activity to another (gymnastics was Terrie's favorite). Terrie was 4 years old when Sue married Tony Martin. The father-daughter bond between Terrie and Tony was immediate. Tony was Terrie's 'Papa Bear' and she was his Daddy's girl. Working in sales Tony was compelled to "follow the work" and the family was forced to relocate several times. Growing up, Terrie lived in Calgary, Saskatoon, Medicine Hat, Invermere, the Yukon and Winnipeg.

As a youth Terrie excelled in school. She was active in drama and choir and even won first place in a school science fair. "Her teachers used to say, 'I wish all my students were like her,'" remembers Sue. Terrie had many special relationships, especially with teachers. She was also close with Sue's girlfriends, women she could call if she did



not feel like talking to her parents. Still, Sue and Tony say that as a teenager Terrie suffered from low self-confidence. They say that although Terrie had many friends, she was also seen as somewhat of a ‘nerd’ because she excelled at school and not did smoke or drink. She was not considered ‘popular’ and received little attention from the boys in her classes. These experiences had an impact. Sue and Tony believe it was low self-esteem that led their daughter to Ken.

Terrie was 14 when she started dating 18 year old Ken. Sue and Tony were immediately concerned. “Ken had actually come to live with us when Terrie was 12,” says Sue. “We got to know Ken and his mother when we were living in Saskatoon. Ken had been getting in trouble, but Tony and I felt that he could be a good kid with some guidance. We decided to try to help him before he completely ruined his life.” But when Terrie announced that she and Ken were dating, Sue and Tony were alarmed. They felt Ken was too old for Terrie and the relationship was inappropriate. “We decided we had to protect our daughter,” says Tony, “so we told Ken he could no longer live with us.” They say that although they asked Ken not to communicate with their daughter, Ken and Terrie remained in constant contact through letters and by phone.

In the spring of 1993, Tony was offered a job in Manitoba and the family prepared to move to Winnipeg. Ken moved to Winnipeg soon after and by the Fall of 1994, Ken and Terrie were together constantly. Sue and Tony say Ken drove Terrie, now 16, to school in the morning and picked her up in the afternoon, isolating her from her friends. Terrie became increasingly moody and rebellious. Around this time, Sue and Tony started to notice bruises on Terrie. Despite their panic, they were scared to do anything that might cause her to pull away more than she already had. “We just didn’t know what to do,” says Sue. “We were terrified that if we pushed her, she’d run away with Ken and we would lose her completely.”

Sue and Tony struggled to find the best way to help Terrie. As survivors of family violence (Tony also experienced violence as child), Sue and Tony felt the decision to end the relationship had to come from Terrie. She could not be forced. Around the same time, Sue’s sister was diagnosed with breast cancer. She asked Sue to come to Ottawa to help her through the chemotherapy. Eventually, Sue decided to go to Ottawa to do what she could. Tony kept his job in Winnipeg, but travelled frequently to Ottawa to be with Sue and her sister. Having promised Terrie that she could finish high school in Winnipeg, Sue and Tony arranged for a family friend to stay with Terrie when Tony was in Ottawa. Recalling this period, Sue and Tony say that Terrie’s mood changed rapidly. One day she was



blissfully happy, the next she was terribly depressed. “Ken and Terrie were constantly fighting and making up. On several occasions she told us Ken had hurt her,” says Tony. Tony confronted Ken about the violence, but with little effect. “When Terrie found out I had talked to Ken she got so mad at us,” Tony remembers. Not knowing what else to do, Sue and Tony focused on making sure Terrie knew they loved her. They encouraged her to break-up with Ken and told her repeatedly that they would help her leave him.

After spending ten months with Sue’s sister, Sue and Tony decided to relocate permanently to the Ottawa area. Again, they asked Terrie to leave Ken. “She flat-out refused to leave him,” recounts Tony. Terrie then told her parents that she and Ken had decided to move in together. Terrie was now 17 years old. She had graduated from high school with honours and refused to listen to anything her parents had to say. Over the next several months Tony made many trips to Winnipeg to visit Terrie. He says she often had bruises on her arms, face and neck. Tony tried desperately to get Terrie to come home, but she insisted that she “knew what she was doing.” She said that if her parents tried to interfere she would not allow them in her life. Torn between their desire to protect their daughter and their fear of pushing her away, Sue and Tony felt helpless. There seemed to be no alternative but to accept Terrie’s involvement with Ken.

In August 1996, Terrie visited her parents in Ottawa. It was the last time they saw their daughter alive. Two days after returning to Winnipeg, Terrie called home crying uncontrollably. She told Sue and Tony that Ken had hurt her again and that she wanted to come home for good. Terrie asked her parents to send money for a plane ticket so she could fly back to Ottawa. Sue and Tony transferred the money, but Terrie never went to pick it up. Several hours later, Terrie called her parents and told them that she and Ken had made up. “She said their fighting was all her fault and that her relationship with her family was causing all the trouble between her and Ken,” remembers Tony. Terrie went on to say that she and Ken had decided to get married. Frustrated and terrified for Terrie’s safety, Sue and Tony decided that they could no longer accept Terrie’s relationship with Ken. “We told them we would only support the marriage if they went to counselling for the violence going on between them,” says Tony. Ken refused. When Terrie hung up the phone, Sue and Tony realized that their worst fear had finally been realized: they had lost their daughter.

Soon after this phone call, Ken and Terrie disappeared from Winnipeg. Frantic, Sue and Tony contacted the Winnipeg Police Service and attempted to file a missing persons report. The officer



who took the call refused. “They said Terrie was an adult, there was nothing they could do,” Tony recalls. With no help from the police, they decided to ask a friend who was a private investigator for help. Seven months later, the private investigator located Terrie and Ken in Calgary. Tony phoned the house and left several messages for Terrie. A short time later, Terrie called. “She said she was a big girl with a good head on her shoulders and just to leave her alone,” remembers Sue.

Terrie still spoke occasionally to her sisters and in 1998 Tony and Sue learned that Ken and Terrie, now 18, were married. Terrie gave birth to her first daughter soon after. Following the birth of her baby, Terrie finally contacted her parents. She was eager to rebuild their relationship. After a few months of telephone calls, Terrie asked Sue and Tony to come to Calgary for a visit. Terrie was very excited, and in the days leading up to the visit Sue and Tony talked to Terrie almost daily. Then, without warning, everything changed. The day before they were scheduled to arrive in Calgary Terrie suddenly became very cold and withdrawn. “She said Ken was not happy we were coming,” says Sue. Frustrated and bitterly disappointed, Sue decided to “practice tough love.” It would be her last conversation with Terrie. Sue and Tony continued to receive news and updates about Terrie from their other daughters. In 2002, they learned that Terrie had given birth to her third child.

Terrie was found murdered in her home on April 29, 2002. She was killed during the night, her children locked in their bedrooms. In the days following Terrie’s murder, Ken was identified as a “person of interest.” Terrie’s children were placed in the temporary custody of foster parents. Sue and Tony would later learn that Terrie had separated from Ken three months before her murder and was in the process of having the separation made legal. They were also told by investigators that Terrie had called the police to her home on March 8, 2002. According to one of Terrie’s friends who was there at the time, the officers who responded interviewed Terrie and contacted social services, but no one was charged. 52 days later, Terrie was murdered. She was only 24 years old.

From the beginning, police believed that Terrie knew the person who killed her. There were no signs of forced entry and the killer was able to enter her house, which was situated on a quiet street in Calgary’s northwest, unnoticed. In addition, Calgary police have since revealed that the killer knew the layout of the home. Staff Sgt. Craig Cuthbert was one of two primary investigators originally assigned to the case. In an interview with CBC News, Cuthbert explains the process behind the investigation: “You have to look at who has access to the



home? Who has access to the individual? And who could possibly do such a thing? And of course we had a person of interest in her former husband, or estranged husband.”

Initially, police seemed confident in their ability to arrest Terrie’s killer. In April 2002, Cuthbert was quoted in the *Calgary Herald* as saying, “The person who did this should understand that it’s only a matter of time before we have him or her in custody.” But no one was ever charged. Terrie’s murder remains unsolved. Through police, Sue learned that after completing a 16 day parenting course Ken regained care of the three children and moved to Saskatchewan. Homicide detectives have attempted to visit Ken in Saskatchewan but he refused to speak with them. “Since the initial investigation, [Ken] has not contacted myself or any other member of the homicide unit. He has never asked for any assistance or follow-up,” said Cuthbert in 2008.

Recalling the night she learned of Terrie’s death, Sue’s voice is soft but her memories are vivid. She was watching TV in her bedroom (she remembers the show—it was *Investigative Reports*), when she heard the phone ring. Shauna, who was visiting at the time, answered. A few moments later, Sue heard Shauna cry out, “Terrie’s been murdered!” At first, Sue and Tony did not believe her. Sue describes the next few moments as oddly disjointed. Her own terrified screams, Shauna saying, “Daddy, the police want to talk to you,” Tony telling Shauna to hold on to Sue while he grabbed the phone. “I was suicidal,” says Sue. “I didn’t want to live because my whole world was destroyed again... such an evil crime.” She recalls the agony of waiting for the next plane to Calgary. In her dreams, Sue could hear Terrie calling “Mommy, Mommy.” All she could think about was seeing her daughter. “I thought if I could just see her, I would be okay,” says Sue quietly. After Terrie’s murder everyday occurrences, things normally taken for granted, assumed new meaning. The routine greeting of a friendly flight attendant, “Are you going to Calgary for pleasure?” was suddenly traumatic.

They had to wait a few days before they could see Terrie. Sue recounts seeing her daughter on a steel slab, a single sheet covering her body and Tony’s legs buckling at the sight of her. “He had so many dreams for her,” says Sue. “She was going to succeed in life, she was going to change the world. She was supposed to accomplish it all.” Terrie’s parents went to Calgary expecting answers, expecting justice. Instead, they left with their daughter’s remains, a single portrait of Terrie and the cherished memories of a single, hour long visit with their three grandchildren. “I love them so much,” Sue says. “I want them with me. I just want them to know how much their Grammy and Papa love them.”



It was a few years before the weight of Terrie's death finally overwhelmed Sue. Grief caused her to say "ugly" things to people she loved. She was suffering panic attacks, something she had never experienced, not even when Sherry died. Sue wanted to run away. "I'd had enough," she says simply. "I didn't want to face it anymore. I didn't want to deal with it anymore. I just wanted to die and end my pain." Finally, she accepted an offer to go and stay with a close friend and Native Healer. Sue spent a week sitting with the Healer and two Elders. They talked about Sue's childhood, what she went through as girl and the violence she experienced as an adult. With the guidance of the Elders, Sue cleansed, reflected and talked. She made a list of all the people who had hurt her. "They can't hurt you anymore," said the Healer. "It's over." It was soon after, Sue says, that Terrie's spirit first came to her. "Terrie touched my heart and said, 'No more, Mommy. You didn't do this. No more.'"

"She touched me," says Sue. "And she took away the anger, all the hate, everything that I was feeling inside, she took it away."

Sue and Tony are very frustrated with the justice system in Canada. They have little respect for some of the officers who have worked on Terrie's case. While they praise certain detectives, in particular Staff Sgt. Cliff O'Brien, Sue and Tony say that other officers have done little to keep them informed of their activities or progress. Even when they called to ask for updates, their messages often went unreturned.

Sue emphasizes the need for police to communicate with families: answer their questions, explain the process and maintain regular contact. Sue and Tony understand that in the context of an open investigation there are things the police cannot disclose. But they still need to need to address families' questions, even if it is only to explain *why* they cannot share certain information. Sue and Tony say because some officers failed to call or update them regularly, they were often left to assume that nothing was being done. They felt like Terrie, her life and the fact that her case remained unsolved, were not important. Sue also notes the need for resources for *families* of victims, rather than limiting eligibility for programs and services to the so-called 'next of kin.' Sue and Tony were unable to access any Victim's Services funding, such as reimbursement for their plane ticket to Calgary or other related expenses, without Ken's permission. Sue says all the funds went to Terrie's husband as her 'next of kin.'

For 10 years Sue and Tony struggled to find the best way to protect their daughter. Looking back, they wonder what, if anything, they could have done to prevent her death. Although she recognizes Terrie's murder was not her fault, Sue is haunted by their final



conversation. Frustrated and feeling as though she had tried everything else, Sue adopted a “tough love” approach to Terrie’s involvement with Ken. She believes that was a mistake. “The ‘tough love’ thing just doesn’t work,” Sue says quietly. “People need to know that.” But perhaps most painful is the loss of her grandchildren. Sue and Tony say that Ken has prohibited them from having any contact with their grandchildren. The separation is devastating. Not only have they lost their daughter, they have lost their grandchildren as well.

Almost seven years have passed and Terrie’s murder remains unsolved. Still, Sue and Tony are determined to see someone held responsible for Terrie’s death. Sue travels to Calgary when she can to talk with the police and to try to keep her daughter’s case in the media. In April 2009, Sue will travel to Calgary to hold a vigil in Terrie’s memory. It will be Sue’s second vigil for her daughter: the first was held in April 2008. Sue and Tony try to stay positive but the process is frustrating. They are sure someone knows what happened to their daughter and are pleading for anyone with information to come forward. The silence needs to be broken. “We need the truth. Our daughter was murdered... why protect that person?” they ask.

Staff Sgt Cliff O'Brien was the third primary detective to look at Terrie’s case. He echoes Sue and Tony’s call for new information and remains confident that Terrie’s killer will be held accountable for her death. He states:

*I have no doubt that someone out there has some information that will move this investigation forward. I urge anyone with information, no matter how seemingly insignificant they think it might be, to call the Calgary Police Service or Crimestoppers. For years now I have watched the pain and anguish that Terrie’s parents and family are going through and I would like nothing better than to bring the person responsible for Terrie’s murder to justice; I think that Terrie, her parents, siblings and children deserve at least this much. We will continue to work on Terrie’s case and follow up on leads that come in until we get justice for her and her family. The person responsible for the murder should know that we’re not going away; at any time on any day we may get that crucial piece of information we need and show up at the killer’s door to make the arrest. I look forward to that day!*

Sue knows that Terrie will always be with her. “It is not that Terrie’s gone, it’s the way that she died,” says Sue. Sue and Tony firmly believe they know who killed their daughter. They want justice and



they refuse to wait in silence. “If I can save one family from going through what I went through, if I can prevent more children from losing their Mother, then I’m here,” explains Sue. “And I’ll never stop being a voice.”

Anyone with information regarding Terrie’s murder is asked to call the Calgary Police Service at 1.403.266.1234 or Calgary Crime Stoppers at 1.800.222.TIPS (8477) to leave an anonymous tip.

*Sue and Tony would like to acknowledge Jason van Russell of the Calgary Herald for his commitment to keeping Terrie’s case in the news. They would like to thank Theresa Ross for her support and friendship of their daughter Terrie and for caring for Terrie’s children in the months following her death. Sue would also like to thank Heather Johnson for her ongoing friendship, support and guidance. Finally, Sue and Tony would like to thank the Calgary Police detectives that took the time to talk with them and answer their questions truthfully. In particular, they would like to thank Detective Cliff O’Brien. “We need more detectives like Cliff who care and have a good heart,” says Sue.*

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The following poem was written by Terrie’s father, Tony, in her memory.

To Terrie:  
And what is the memory that’s valued so highly  
that we keep it alive in that flame?  
What’s the commitment for those who have died,  
when we cry out they have not died in vain?  
We have come this far always believing that  
justice would somehow prevail.  
This is the burden, this is the promise,  
and THIS is why we will not fail.  
Don’t let the light go out  
It’s lasted for so many years  
Don’t let the light go out  
Let it shine through our love and our fears and  
Our tears  
Love, Papa Bear



## Our Missing Sisters



**Claudette Osborne –  
Missing since July 24, 2008**

*This story was written by Bernadette Smith,  
Claudette's oldest sister.*

My sister Claudette Osborne-Tyo has been missing for eight months now. No one seems to know where she is or what has happened to her. But our family believes someone knows. People don't just disappear. The person(s) who knows where she is or what has happened to her must have sleepless nights. This has to be weighing on their conscience; it is a huge burden for anyone to carry. Crime Stoppers is anonymous and I encourage anyone with information to call 1.204.786.8477. No matter how small the detail, it could be the piece of the puzzle that brings Claudette home. Get what you know off of your conscience and help our family wake up from this nightmare. Our family is not concerned with bringing someone to justice. We only want to bring Claudette home to a family who misses and loves her.

Our family prays every morning and night that this will be the day Claudette is found. It has been very hard on our family; the not knowing and going through day-to-day life wondering where she is. Many of Claudette's family members and friends have dreamt of her. They describe it as if her spirit is visiting them but is lost. She is asking them to come to her but they can never reach her. We need to know where our beloved daughter, mother, sister, fiancée, cousin and friend has gone. We need to know what has happened to Claudette, even if she is not alive. It is extremely hard but we have come to terms with this possibility. Claudette deserves a proper burial if she has left us to be with the Creator. Claudette would never willingly leave her kids for this long. Her son Iziah is two years old now. He pushes around a truck with his mom's picture on the back of it, and he is always talking to it. Layla, who is almost four, is always asking for her mom. What do you say to them? It is heartbreaking. Claudette's daughter Patience is almost nine months old. She is a reminder of how long Claudette has been gone. She was just two weeks old when her mom went missing. These children deserve to know where their mom is or what has happened to her. They deserve to have her home!

Claudette put her children first and the temporary bump she was dealing with was just that: temporary. She was committed to raising her kids so they had more than she did growing up. Claudette worked and played with her children every day so they developed into happy and healthy children. She loved her kids and would never leave them.

Matt Bushby, the father of Claudette’s children, says

*I want you to know that I tell your babies every time I put them to bed that you love them very much and miss them and I give them a hug and kiss from you. This is a task I don't take lightly but I do wish you were here for them. I know they will be missing out on your wonderful love. I always was impressed by how you managed with such ease to care for our family. I am not going to give up on you. I will keep looking until you are found. You're the last thing that goes through my mind before I finally fall asleep and the first thing that comes to me when I wake. Every time I look at our beautiful children I think of you. I get to enjoy watching them grow and learn and I know you would be here next to me if you could. So many scenarios have played in my head and I don't like any of them. I only know you to be a good mom and would never leave this long without getting in touch with some one we know. I pray someone will come forward to let us know what has happened to you. I love you and always will. You are the one for me.*

She took her problems seriously and was getting back to a healthy lifestyle. She had completed parenting courses and relationship counselling. She had her City of Winnipeg food handler’s certificate. Claudette planned to get her high school diploma and go into social work. She felt her experiences would help other young women in similar situations. She had already helped several women to get off the streets and back home.

The police did not notify the public about Claudette’s disappearance for two weeks. Our family had to convince them that she was missing. The police dismissed our reports, saying “her lifestyle is transient.” In our family’s eyes this response compromised the investigation because it took two weeks for Claudette’s disappearance to be taken seriously. Evidence and possibly people's memories were lost. We continue to do our own investigating and talk to anyone who will listen to the story of Claudette’s disappearance.

Our family is waiting for the snow to melt so we, along with Manitoba Search and Rescue, can do ground searches again. The



police have not conducted and have no plans to conduct ground searches unless they get “concrete evidence.” To this point the police have little or no evidence. This has been extremely frustrating for our family. We feel that police do not believe foul play is even a possibility in Claudette’s disappearance. Are they looking hard enough and turning over every possible stone? Our family hopes so. We have sought outside help from Norway House Cree Nation, Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs and Southern Chiefs Organizations to ensure that the police are accountable to us as her family, that they keep us updated and to make sure that her case is not collecting dust. We will do everything in our power to find her and we will not give up until she is found.

Our family will not give up hope. We will continue the search to find Claudette. We have put up posters, set up a Facebook site (help bring Claudette Osborne home), held candlelight vigils, organized a search party, taken part in marches, rallies and fundraisers. We have even put up billboards, not only in Winnipeg but also in Calgary and Edmonton. We have done all of this in an attempt to keep Claudette’s disappearance in the public eye in the hopes that this will be the day that someone remembers seeing something and comes forward with information that leads to her whereabouts.

Too many people have gone missing or have been murdered. We hear these statistics rise everyday. We consider ourselves an advanced and compassionate society yet we treat so many of our fellow citizens as invisible because of their culture, colour, sex, age, lifestyle and other attributes that are not a part of the status quo. We as a community have to stand united and demand action from the government and law enforcements. It is their duty to protect our citizens. After all, every creation is a blessing and must be held sacred by all!

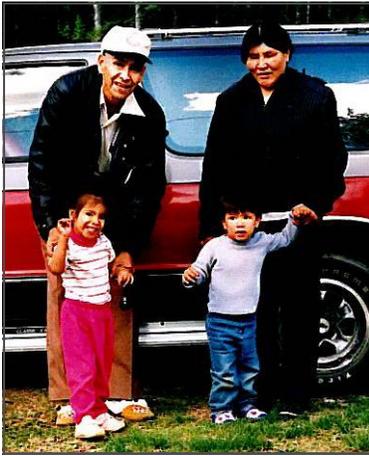
I remember one time when Claudette was just a baby...

*My boyfriend and I broke up. I was really sad and emotional. Dad asked if I'd come over and babysit you and the other girls. I didn't want to but he came and picked me up. When I arrived, there you were in your jolly jumper with your big beautiful smile. You were so excited to see me.*

*I felt so good inside. I knew somebody loved me unconditionally and everything was going to be okay. I sit here in tears writing this because I may never see your big beautiful smile or feel that unconditional love from you again. Please come home so we can make more memories together.*



In sharing our family's story of the search for our loved one, we are honoring Claudette and pleading for the public's assistance in locating her. Our family is offering a \$20,000 reward for information that leads to her whereabouts. If you know anything about Claudette's disappearance please call Crime Stoppers at 1.204.786.8477 or toll-free at 1.800.222.8477. Please help to bring her home!



**Elizabeth Dorian –  
Missing since November 13, 1999**

Elizabeth Dorian was born on December 15, 1954, in The Pas, Manitoba. She is a member of Opaskwayak Cree Nation. She has three children: two daughters and one son. Elizabeth lived her life to the fullest despite the challenges that were thrown her way.

Elizabeth has been missing since November 13, 1999. She was last seen in Pukatawagan, Manitoba, at a fishing camp. Elizabeth started walking from Pukatawagan en route to The Pas but never reached her destination. Elizabeth is shown in the picture above with her late common-law husband, Paul Bignell, and two of her children, Elsie and Flynn.

If you have any information on Elizabeth's whereabouts, please contact Edna Bignell at 1.204.546.2703.



**Emily Osmond (LaPlante) –  
Missing since September 9, 2007**

Age: 78  
Height: 5'3"  
Weight: 130 pounds  
Hair colour: Grey  
Eye colour: Brown  
Distinguishing Features: Walks with a cane due to arthritis in her hip

Emily was last seen at her residence north of Kawacatoose First Nation, Saskatchewan. Her disappearance is very unusual. Emily's vehicle and personal belongings, including medication, were left at her residence. Her dogs, which she cared for herself, were also left unattended. Searches of the area have failed to locate any sign of Emily.

If you have any information regarding Emily's disappearance, please contact the Regina RCMP Historical Case Unit at 1.306.780.5582 or Myrna LaPlante at 1.306.281.9621 or [myrnalaplante@hotmail.com](mailto:myrnalaplante@hotmail.com).



**Lisa Marie Young –  
Missing since June 30, 2002**

Height: 5'4"  
Weight: 115 pounds  
Hair colour: Long dark hair  
Eye colour: Brown

Lisa Marie was 21 years old when she disappeared on June 30, 2002. She was last seen riding in a burgundy Jaguar in the Jingle Pot area of Nanaimo, British Columbia. She was wearing a black skirt, a black top, high black boots and a silver hooped necklace. Lisa Marie has a tattoo of a band of flowers with a heart in the middle on her right arm.

If you have any information about Lisa Marie's whereabouts, please contact the RCMP in Nanaimo at 1.250.754.2345. A reward is offered for any information related to her disappearance.



**Maisy Odjick –  
Missing since September 6, 2008**

Age: 16  
Height: 6'  
Hair colour: Black  
Eye colour: Brown  
Distinguishing Features: Pierced left nostril and two piercings on her bottom lip

Maisy was last seen in the area of Maniwaki, Québec. She is believed to be with her friend Shannon Alexander, who has also been missing since September 6, 2008.

If you have any information about Maisy's whereabouts, please contact the Sûreté du Québec at 1.819.310.4141 or the Kitigan Zibi Police Department at 1.819.449.6000.

For further information, please visit *Find Maisy and Shannon* at [www.findmaisvandshannon.com](http://www.findmaisvandshannon.com).



**Marie Kreiser (née Saint Saver) –  
Missing since Fall 1987**

Marie Jeanne Kreiser was born on September 12, 1938, in Wabasca, Alberta, to Pierre Saint Saver and Adelaide Crow. Pierre was of Métis descent and Adelaide was a member of the Bigstone Cree Nation. As a girl Marie attended St. Martin's Residential School located on the Bigstone Cree Nation (Wabasca). She last resided in Slave Lake, Alberta. Marie is mother to Sharon, Arlene, Lorna, Brian and Gail. She was reported missing in the

Fall of 1987 to the Edmonton Police as well as the RCMP detachment in Slave Lake. She is still missing.

If you have any information concerning Marie's disappearance, please contact the RCMP in Slave Lake at 1.780.849.3045.



**Pamela Holopainen –  
Missing Since December 14, 2003**

Height: 5'2"

Weight: 126 pounds

Hair colour: Brown

Eye colour: Blue

Distinguishing Features: Has two tattoos on her left hand. The first tattoo is described as a web, located between the thumb and index finger. The second tattoo is of the initials "DI."

Pamela Jayne Holopainen was last seen leaving a party in Timmins, Ontario, in the early hours of December 14, 2003. Pamela's family says she left accompanied by her common-law spouse. She was last seen wearing a purple Columbia jacket, a silver necklace with a silver eagle pendant and as many as four rings. At the time of her disappearance, Pamela was 22 years old.

Pamela has not been in contact with any of her family members or her two small children. This is completely out of character and police strongly suspect foul play in her disappearance. Pamela was reported missing by a family member on December 31, 2003. She is of Inuit descent.

If you have any information regarding Pamela's disappearance, please contact the Ontario Provincial Police (O.P.P.) at 1.888.310.1122 or 1.705.329.6111. The O.P.P. have stated that they presume Pamela is deceased. A reward of \$50,000 is offered for any information leading to the arrest and conviction of the person or persons responsible for her disappearance.

There is a group dedicated to Pamela on Facebook with additional pictures and a video.



**Shannon Alexander –  
Missing since September 6, 2008**

Age: 17  
Height: 5'9"  
Weight: 145 pounds  
Hair colour: Brown  
Eye colour: Brown  
Distinguishing Features: Acne and pierced ears. Wears a silver necklace with a feather on it. Also has a scar on her left knee.

Shannon was last seen in the area of Maniwaki, Québec. She is believed to be with her friend Maisy Odjick, who has also been missing since September 6, 2008.

If you have any information about Shannon's whereabouts, please contact the Sûreté du Québec at 1.819.310.4141 or the Kitigan Zibi Police Department at 1.819.449.6000.

For further information, please visit *Find Maisy and Shannon* at [www.findmaisyyandshannon.com](http://www.findmaisyyandshannon.com).



**Tiffany Morrison –  
Missing since June 18, 2006**

Tiffany Morrison is a Mohawk woman from the Kahnawake Mohawk Territory. Tiffany was 25 years old when she disappeared on June 18, 2006. Energetic and completely devoted to her daughter, Tiffany's family knows that she would never disappear willingly. "She would never leave her daughter," they say. "Someone knows something. Our hope depends on them coming forward."

Tiffany was last seen leaving a bar in the town of LaSalle, Quebec. She shared a taxi back to Kahnawake with a man from the community. He has told police that she remained in the taxi after he was let out at his own house. Although taxi drivers are required to report their fares, they don't always do so. To date, the police have not been able to identify the taxi company or locate the driver. Tiffany's bank account and credit card have not been used since that night.

The Kahnawake Peacekeepers, the police force for the Kahnawake First Nation, is treating Tiffany's disappearance as a criminal investigation.

Anyone with information regarding Tiffany's disappearance is asked to contact the Kahnawake Peacekeepers at 1.450.632.6505.

Further information about Tiffany's disappearance is available on Amnesty International Canada's website at: [http://www.amnesty.ca/campaigns/sisters\\_tiffany\\_morrison.php](http://www.amnesty.ca/campaigns/sisters_tiffany_morrison.php).



## Our Stolen Sisters



### **Gladys Tolley**

Gladys was Algonquin from Kitigan Zibi Anishnabeg. She was struck and killed by the Sûreté du Québec (SQ) on October 6, 2001. Her daughter, Bridget, believes that the SQ officers that killed Gladys were negligent. Bridget feels the dignity and respect of her mother and family members were greatly breached by all police officers and by the investigating team.

Gladys' family believes the police file was filled with inaccuracies and incongruent reports. Her family does not believe that the investigation procedures were conducted according to accepted practices. The family is calling for an independent investigation regarding the events surrounding the accident as well as a public review of the conduct of the police officers and the homicide team at the scene.

If anyone has information about Gladys' death, please contact Bridget at [tolleyb@hotmail.com](mailto:tolleyb@hotmail.com) or 1.819.441.1488.



### **Kelly Morrisseau**

The Morrisseau family has not had any justice regarding Kelly's murder. They are patiently waiting for this day to come. Anyone with information is asked to contact the Gatineau Police Department's Detective M. LePage at 1.819.243.2346.

Kelly was murdered December 10, 2006, in the National Capital Region. She was seven months pregnant.



### **Lisa Faye Sheepskin**

Lisa was a vibrant 18-year-old girl who was in grade 11 when she was tragically taken from her family. She was the kind of person who would make a beautiful difference in the world. Lisa was proud of her culture and she was always there to help anyone in need of anything. She loved life, her family and her friends, even those who passed her and smiled or said hello. Lisa will always be remembered, missed and loved.

Lisa was born January 1, 1982. She was a great athlete who excelled at everything she tried. Lisa planned to move back to her home community, White Bear First Nation. She loved kids and her family unconditionally. She always had fun when spending time with her nieces and nephews. Lisa could not wait to start a family of her own.

Lisa's family loves and misses her.

Lisa was murdered on February 26, 2000, in Regina, Saskatchewan.



### **Shelley Joseph**

A Mohawk woman from Six Nations of the Grand River Territory, Shelley Lynne Joseph is remembered as the loving mother of four children. She is also cherished as a beloved daughter, grandmother, sister, aunt, cousin and friend. On July 2, 2004, Shelley was murdered in Hamilton, Ontario. She was 40 years old.



### **Tragic News**

Our lives were changed by the tragic news  
Detectives are piecing together the clues,  
“It happened so fast there was nothing we could do”  
Thinking to myself “this can’t be true,”  
Our bodies went numb and tears started to flow  
What lay ahead we didn’t know  
Your life stole away by this heartless man  
The preachers talked about “God’s perfect plan,”  
Some kind of plan for him to take you this way  
Making us re-live it every day,  
Please take me back to yester year  
When life made sense and you were here,  
God, take away our tears at night  
Dry our eyes so we can find the light,  
Guide our way through each new day  
Help us try to find the way,  
We’ll be with her again it’s true  
When we fade and life starts anew.

- *Sheena Joseph, Shelley’s daughter*

### **Sometimes I Wish You Were Still Here**

You know there are times in this world when even a  
man needs someone to talk to  
Someone who means more than a friend  
Someone who’ll be there until the end  
Someone who’ll let you spread your wings  
Someone to tell you things  
Yes, sometimes I wish you were still here

You know, even more than I like to admit, from  
time to time I still need your advice  
I remember telling you about a girl  
I remember letting you back into my world  
I remember the 1<sup>st</sup> day you said good-bye  
I remember every night after that I cried  
And yes, sometimes I wish you were still here

So right now, there’s nothing more in this world I  
could ever want  
Than a friend in this world to make up my mind  
Than a friend to listen to both sides  
Than a match to light my way  
While I search for a better day  
And when I find it, yeah, I’ll still wish you were here

-*Ivan Joseph, Shelley’s son*





### **Tashina General**

A beautiful and strong Cayuga woman, Tashina Cheyenne Vaughn General is remembered for the respect she gave to her culture and tradition. Tashina had a very strong bond with her mother Denise and brother Madison. Denise describes her children as “my everything.” Not a day goes by that Denise doesn’t tell Tashina she loves her or include her in conversation. Denise is thankful that Tashina is in a better place with her baby and loved ones who have passed on.

Denise was a young mother when she had Tashina, or “Tashi” as she would call her; the two of them were inseparable. Some of their best times were spent driving in their car while listening to music and talking. Denise and Tashina would laugh together and after a few moments of silence passed, they would burst out laughing again.

When Madison came into their lives, he cried a lot as a baby. Denise tried everything to make him stop, but nothing worked. One day Tashina was walking by a tearful Madison when she bumped into something that made a noise—Madison stopped crying to laugh at his sister! From that point on, it was Tashina’s duty to stop Madison from crying. She would do cartwheels for him and she once made him a toy car out of a cardboard box (which he loved even more than his store-bought toys).

Tashina was 21 years old when she disappeared from Ohsweken, Ontario on January 22, 2008. At the time of her disappearance, Tashina was four months pregnant. She had already chosen a name for her baby boy. She was going to call him Tucker. The whole family was excited by the prospect of having a baby around again. Tashina’s family, friends and community were devastated when, after three months of searching for Tashina, her body was finally found on April 25, 2008.

In July, 2008 family, friends and community members held a memorial walk and tree planting ceremony in Six Nations to honour the lives of Tashina and her baby. They wore t-shirts with Tashina’s picture and the expression: “Beauty comes from within...Keep Smiling!” The phrase “Beauty comes from within,” comes from Tashina’s mother. The words remind us of the inner beauty that came



through whenever Tashina smiled. “Keep smiling” was one of Tashina’s favourite sayings. Through their tears, friends and family drew strength in their memories of Tashina. They remembered her open and generous personality and how she was always ready to help; whatever the situation, Tashina was always there for those who needed her. Her friends and family will never forget the free-spirited and sunny young woman who never stopped smiling.

*On April 29, 2008, Six Nations police charged a 20 year-old man with second-degree murder in Tashina’s death.*



## **Sisters In Spirit Communications and Education Highlights**

### **Grandmother Moon**

Grandmother Moon is a teaching about Aboriginal women's special connection to our Grandmothers who have passed into the Spirit world. Grandmother Moon provides direction, strength, protection, knowledge and wisdom for women about taking our sacred place in our families, communities and beyond. She teaches us about our sacred role as the life-givers and the heart of our nations.

The use of Grandmother Moon as a logo for Sisters In Spirit activities and materials is a powerful way to raise awareness about the issue of violence against Aboriginal women and girls. It signifies the work undertaken by NWAC to address this crisis and the commitment of individuals to remember our sisters and be a part of the solution to this issue. More and more, NWAC's Grandmother Moon logo is recognized as a symbol honouring women and girls lost to violence. It is a visual reminder that our sisters will never be forgotten.

The late artist Dick Baker, of Kwakwaka'wakw (Kwakwiltl) and Coast Salish descent, created the Grandmother Moon image for NWAC's Sisters In Spirit initiative.

### **Sisters In Spirit Family Gatherings**

The Sisters In Spirit initiative is rooted in the power of voice. For too long the voices of our sisters, their families and other loved ones have been silenced. As part of NWAC's commitment to 'giving voice' to missing and murdered Aboriginal women, girls and their families, three Family Gatherings have been held as part of the Sisters In Spirit initiative.

Family gatherings are a way to help empower families of missing and murdered Aboriginal women and girls and honour those who have been lost to violence. They offer a unique opportunity for family members to meet, share experiences and bond with others who are experiencing similar losses and challenges. Families that attended NWAC's Sisters In Spirit Family Gatherings found comfort in the fact that they were not alone in their struggles for healing and for justice, or in their fight to keep the memory of their loved one alive in a positive way.



Fourteen family members representing six missing and murdered sisters participated in the first Sisters In Spirit Family Gathering in Regina, Saskatchewan, in April 2006. The second gathering, in Vancouver, British Columbia, in February 2007, saw thirty participating family members representing twelve sisters. The third gathering, in Edmonton, Alberta, in July 2008, was attended by nearly forty family members representing twenty-three missing and murdered sisters.

The work of healing and sharing was at the forefront of these gatherings. Elders provided spiritual grounding and Sharing Circles promoted healing for participating family members. Inspirational and knowledgeable guest speakers shared messages of hope and encouraged everyone involved to continue their fight for truth and justice.

The Sisters In Spirit Family Gatherings also provided an opportunity for family members to engage with and build relationships with NWAC staff. Participating family members advised NWAC staff of their needs and the gaps in services and assistance they had encountered in their journeys. The inspiration for the Community Education Toolkits, for example, resulted from discussions that occurred at these Family Gatherings.

Above all, the Sisters In Spirit Family Gatherings have nurtured a sense of community among families of missing and murdered Aboriginal women and girls. These connections have empowered some participating family members to establish local support networks. Many families continue to work together to plan events, fundraise, raise awareness and support those who have lost someone to violence. Their commitment, determination, love and strength are truly a testament to the power of gathering together.

### **Sisters In Spirit Vigils: *What Are You Doing on October 4<sup>th</sup>?***

Sisters In Spirit Vigils raise public awareness about missing and murdered Aboriginal women and girls in Canada. It is vital to ensure that everyone, regardless of their cultural background, is aware of this crisis of violence. It must be understood that these women and girls are loved and missed terribly by their families.

In 2001, Bridget Tolley's mother, Gladys, was struck and killed by a Sureté du Québec (police) cruiser. Already involved with NWAC's initial campaign to raise awareness about missing and murdered Aboriginal women in Canada, Bridget told us about her desire to honour her mother, share her story and raise awareness about



violence against Aboriginal women and girls. Eventually, Bridget came to us with the idea of a Sisters In Spirit vigil.

The first Sisters In Spirit Vigil was organized by NWAC, Amnesty International Canada and KAIROS Canada. NWAC was surprised and encouraged when eleven Canadian communities embraced the concept and hosted simultaneous vigils, attracting hundreds of participants, on the same date: October 4, 2006.

In Ottawa, Ontario, the day began with a news conference hosted by NWAC and Amnesty International Canada. NWAC's President held an eagle feather as she spoke with confidence, motivated by the stories of tragedy and heartache she had heard from grieving families across the country. On the steps leading to Parliament Hill's Centre Block many speakers offered words of support to family members. The large crowd held photos of our stolen sisters. A steady rain fell from a heavy grey sky but did not deter participants from marching in solidarity to a sacred piece of land called Victoria Island where an Elder offered a prayer before closing the Vigil and opening the feast.

In 2007, the second Sisters In Spirit Vigil grew from eleven to thirty communities across Canada and included international participation from communities in Peru and Colombia. In Ottawa, a crowd of approximately 400 people gathered on Parliament Hill to the steady beat of drums and singers from Québec and Ontario. In addition to the Vigil, the National Film Board of Canada movie *Finding Dawn* was screened at the Museum of Civilization, where political and community leaders gathered to remember and honour those lost to violence. In Montréal, Québec, the first candle light vigil was hosted by Irkar Beljaar, who lost his mother, a Mohawk woman, as a young child. He was joined by Ellen Gabriel, President of the Femmes Autochtones du Québec Inc./Quebec Native Women Inc. and other speakers who offered words of hope and encouragement. In Vancouver's Downtown Eastside, rain did not stop friends and family members from gathering to share stories of their loved ones. The Vigil was followed by an evening concert at the Yates Hotel.

The third Vigil, in October 2008, saw another increase in the number of participating communities. Forty Vigils were held across Canada. NWAC's President was joined in Ottawa by Aboriginal leaders and families of missing and murdered women and girls. From the steps of Parliament Hill, families shared their stories, remembered their loved ones and spoke of their hopes for the future. The Vigil was followed by an eco-friendly balloon launch. Each community that had held a Vigil in the past saw an increase in the attendance. Many individuals traveled long distances to participate. A community in northern



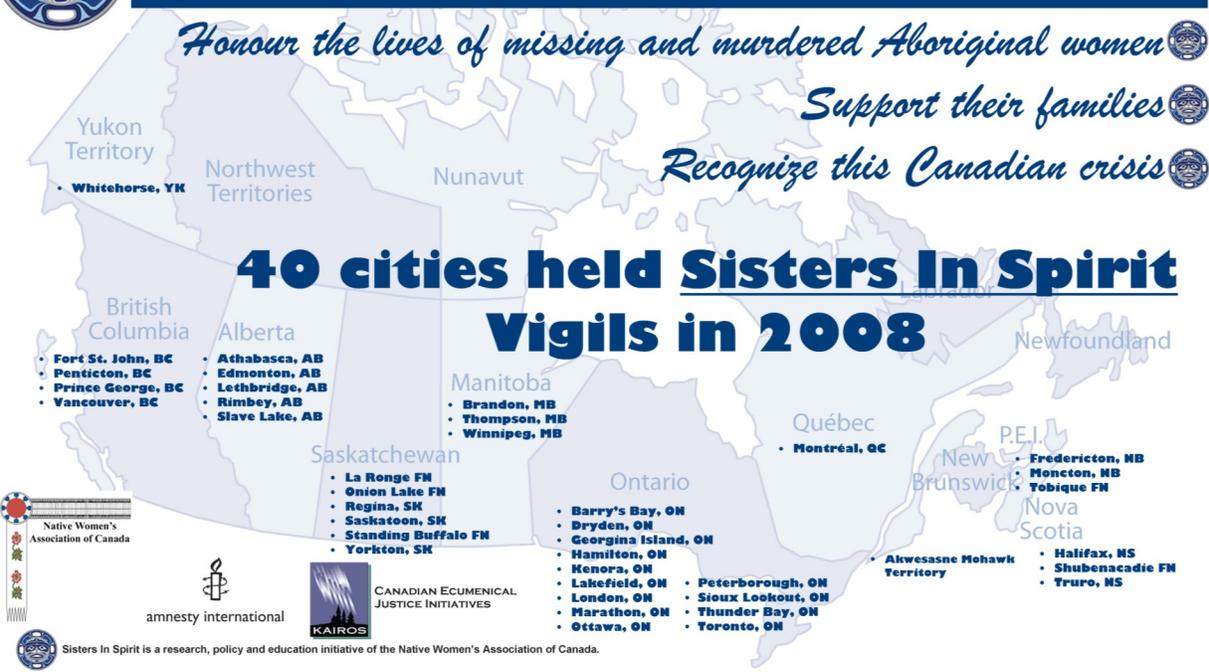


# What are you doing on October 4th?

*Honour the lives of missing and murdered Aboriginal women*

*Support their families*

*Recognize this Canadian crisis*



For more information about the Sisters In Spirit vigils please visit NWAC's website at: [www.nwac-hq.org](http://www.nwac-hq.org)

Québec went so far as to charter a bus for their youth to participate in a Vigil in Montreal.

NWAC is both proud of and humbled by the success and momentum that has been generated from Sisters In Spirit Vigils over the past three years. As we plan for the next Vigil on October 4, 2009, we continue to raise awareness among the public, government and media about missing and murdered Aboriginal women and girls.

## Sisters In Spirit Community Workshops

More than forty Sisters In Spirit Community Workshops have been held in communities across Canada since 2005. The workshop locations and content have changed each year in order to communicate with different audiences, present new research results and better meet the expressed needs of the communities themselves. The workshops provide opportunities for participants to voice their concerns about violence against Aboriginal women and girls. Participants also provide specific input on Sisters In Spirit research, education and policy questions.



Community Workshops have provided information about Sisters In Spirit research results, policies, tool kits and activities such as the vigils, walks, conferences and films. Workshop participants included social service providers, police officers, students, youth, Elders, political and government officials and community members and leaders. NWAC has tracked a significant increase in the attendance at these workshops over the course of the Sisters In Spirit initiative.

Below, we share our memories of special moments and messages that were expressed during these workshops:

*In Kamloops, British Columbia Chief Shane Gottfriedson of the Kamloops Indian Band made welcoming remarks and a local Elder offered prayers and guidance for participants. Another Elder sat in the front row of the group. He appeared saddened and later left the session but returned soon afterward with eagle feathers. He gave the feathers to NWAC and thanked us for our work. His words and support touched everyone.*

*Snuneymuxw First Nation (formerly the Nanaimo Indian Band) told us that violence against Aboriginal women and girls was among a myriad of social issues, including poor housing, poisonous water and economic struggles. Still, the people we met carried an underlying strength and a sense of humour that offered hope and demonstrated the resilience of the community.*

*At the Friendship Centre in Prince Rupert, British Columbia, the overwhelming number of participants made it clear that the community was determined to address the issue of violence against Aboriginal women and girls. A local Elder said that she was impressed with the work being done and that she felt very optimistic for the future of youth.*

*In Edmonton, the Sisters In Spirit workshop and Youth Violence Prevention Toolkit were featured at the Northern Alberta Institute of Technology. The sessions attracted service providers from as far away as Hobbema, Alberta. Actor Jimmy Herman (Dances with Wolves and North of 60) made comments about the ripple effects of violence in the Alberta region and the impact this has on communities.*

*North of 60, the Community Workshop held in Yellowknife, Yukon, was attended by a diverse crowd, including adult Aboriginal students, concerned community members and non-Aboriginal church ministers. The workshop was small but powerful with many participants empathizing with the struggles felt by Aboriginal peoples.*



*In numerous workshops, there was a strong sense of healing and forgiveness. At a workshop in Victoria, British Columbia, an activist and organizer for “Walk4Justice” shared her opinions about issues in Vancouver’s downtown east side. In response, an officer who had travelled all the way from northern British Columbia to participate talked about her experiences as a woman working in law enforcement. She talked about witnessing terrible violence against Aboriginal women. The officer’s pain was real. While the activist and police officer have been at odds in another setting, everyone present witnessed a tremendous breakthrough as the two women hugged then shared their common concerns and hopes for the future.*

*In Prince George, British Columbia, Grand Chief Stewart Phillip of the Union of BC Indian Chiefs flew in from Vancouver, made the opening remarks and stayed the whole day to participate. This was a strong sign that Aboriginal leaders are taking a stand against the violence Aboriginal women and girls face.*

*The Winnipeg, Manitoba workshop had the second highest rate of attendance by law enforcement personnel. At this workshop, an Aboriginal police officer who provides new recruits with Aboriginal cultural training invited NWAC to make a presentation to police recruits.*

*In Thunder Bay, Ontario, another barrier between Aboriginal community members and law enforcement personnel was broken. A police officer spoke from his heart about his hesitation to attend the workshop; he was concerned that he would have to defend law enforcement practices. Other police officers at the session shared his concern, including an Aboriginal officer. The officer said that instead of feeling uncomfortable and pressured, he learned how important it was to have open discussions and communication with community members on how to make the community a safer place for everyone.*

It is evident that Sisters In Spirit Community Workshops have not only raised awareness of violence against Aboriginal women and girls, but have assisted to build bridges and new understandings between justice system personnel and the Aboriginal community. Future Community Workshops will continue to address the issue of violence against Aboriginal women and girls by drawing attention to the root causes of violence and focusing on activities that will help to build healthy relationships.



## Community Education Tool Kits

NWAC has developed four tool kits for use by community members, individuals and organizations. These tool kits can be used to raise awareness about violence against Aboriginal women and girls, to explain the significance of the Sisters In Spirit initiative and to provide specific direction and assistance for those who have lost a family member to violence. Each of the four tool kits is described below.

### *Raising Awareness Tool Kit*

NWAC felt it was important to explain the significance of the Sisters In Spirit initiative and to educate both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities about missing and murdered Aboriginal women and girls.

This tool kit provides basic information on Sisters In Spirit by answering three questions:

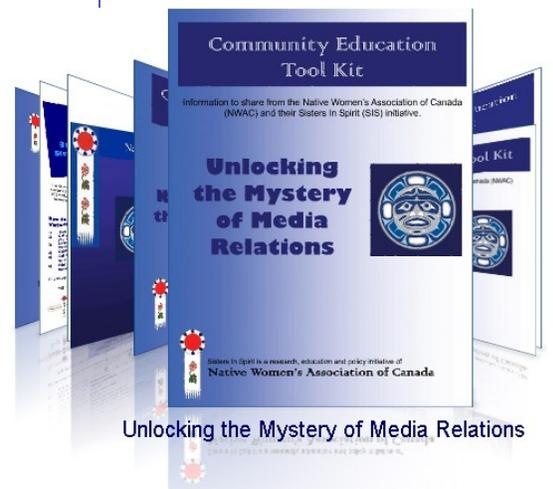
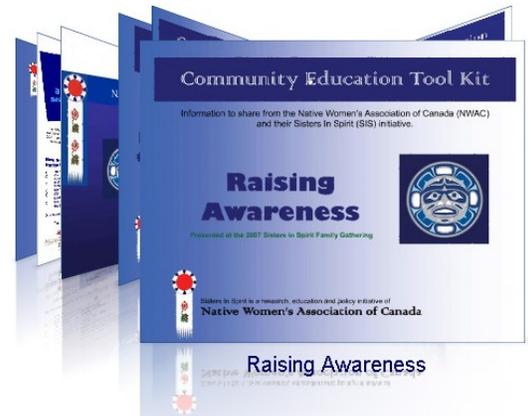
- What is Sisters In Spirit?
- Why is Sisters In Spirit needed?
- How can I raise awareness about the Sisters In Spirit initiative?

The tool kit contains ideas, suggestions and practical tips on how individuals or organizations can work to raise awareness about missing and murdered Aboriginal women and girls. It is being used across Canada as a powerful education and campaigning tool.

### *Unlocking the Mystery of Media Relations Tool Kit*

Family members told NWAC that they often felt re-victimized by the media during interviews with reporters. We heard accounts of reporters being insensitive to family members. Other family members felt betrayed when their loved one was portrayed in a negative light by the media. Some family members told us that they were unsure of their rights when they were approached by the media and that they did not know what to do when information they provided was used improperly or offensively.

This tool kit provides families with guidance on how to deal with members of the media. It contains tips and information on media coverage in general, as well as specific ways to deal with reporters or other media staff during interviews. An appendix titled

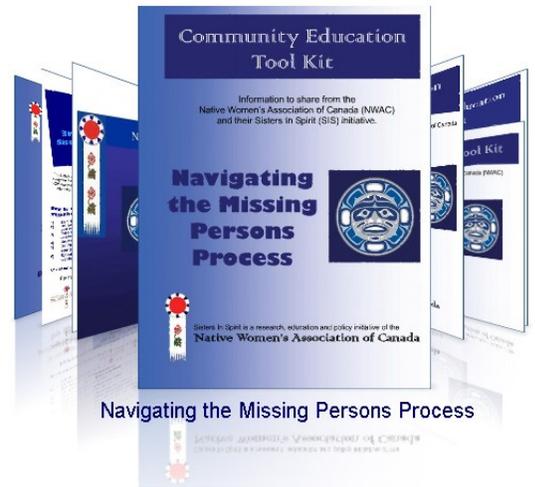


“How Can I Protect the Memory and Reputation of a Loved One in the Media?” was developed to provide additional assistance to families who have lost a family member to violence.

### *Navigating the Missing Persons Process Tool Kit*

Many of the families working with NWAC reported frustrations when trying to get help from police services. They told us about problems they encountered when trying to file a missing persons report, and about feeling left out or uninformed about the course of the investigation and what was being done to find their loved one.

NWAC took these concerns to the National Aboriginal Policing Services department of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP). With their assistance, NWAC staff ‘walked through’ the process of filing a missing persons report. This tool kit illustrates the realities and exposes the myths associated with the process of reporting a missing person to police. Families can use this tool kit to learn about their rights and to track police response and action throughout the process. We are particularly proud that this document has been endorsed by the RCMP and has become an education tool for policing services as well as a resource for families.

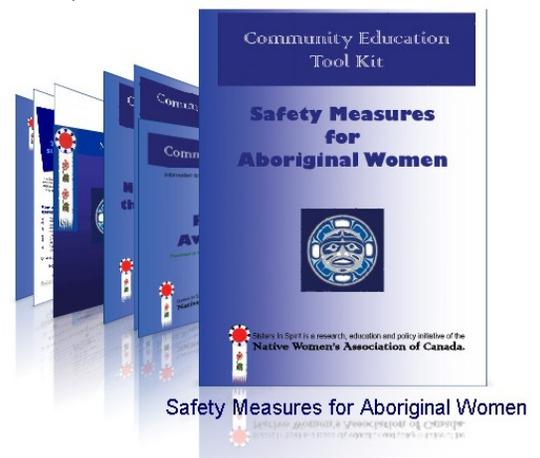


### *Safety Measures for Aboriginal Women Tool Kit*

Families shared their need for a resource that addressed the issue of violence prevention. They asked for a comprehensive tool that was easy to read and understand, that was easily accessible for youth and that they could share with other community members, particularly young women.

Sisters In Spirit staff worked with the NWAC Youth Council to identify key topics and areas of focus for this tool kit. This input from Aboriginal girls and young women was an invaluable source of information for the development of this resource.

This tool kit provides tips on how to be safe at home, at work, while traveling and when accessing health and social services. It explains safety measures in a straightforward way and is small and compact, ideal for carrying in a purse or school bag.



## **Sisters In Spirit Interim Research Results**

Sisters In Spirit research activities are guided by Aboriginal worldviews and ethical guidelines, while utilizing a participatory action approach to conducting research. As a research for change process, this work is designed to uncover root causes, circumstances and trends associated with violence against Aboriginal women and girls. The mixed methods approach used to carry out this research relies on a variety of data collection processes. Conducting interviews with the families of Aboriginal women and girls provides the most detailed and comprehensive account of the life experiences and personal circumstances of women and girls affected by violence.

In many instances it is not possible to conduct interviews with the families. NWAC also relies on a variety of secondary information sources for data which include:

- Newspaper and magazine articles and other news sources;
- RCMP, provincial and municipal law enforcement websites; and,
- Trial transcripts and reported court decisions.

The information that may be gained from these sources is sometimes limited. For this reason, the specific information available often varies widely from person to person.

### **Data Analysis**

NWAC has created a database for recording information about each case. This information is organized according to four themes:

1. Demographic information
2. Life experiences information
3. Incident information
4. Suspect and trial information (where applicable).

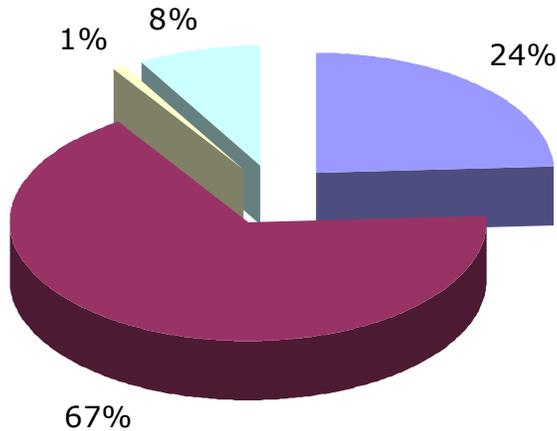
### *Number of Missing and Murdered Women and Girls*

As of March 31, 2009, 520 cases of missing or murdered Aboriginal women and girls had been entered into the NWAC database.<sup>1</sup> Of these 520 women and girls, 126 (24%) have been identified as missing and 347 (67%) have been identified as having died as a result of homicide or negligence.<sup>2</sup> There are 43 cases where the nature of the case remains unconfirmed, and 4 cases of ‘suspicious death.’<sup>3</sup> The NWAC research team updates this information on a regular basis; when a change in the case occurs, the database is



amended to reflect this new information. The figure below presents a summary of these results.

**Figure 1: Nature of the case (N=520)<sup>4</sup>**



■ Missing ■ Murdered ■ Suspicious death ■ Unknown

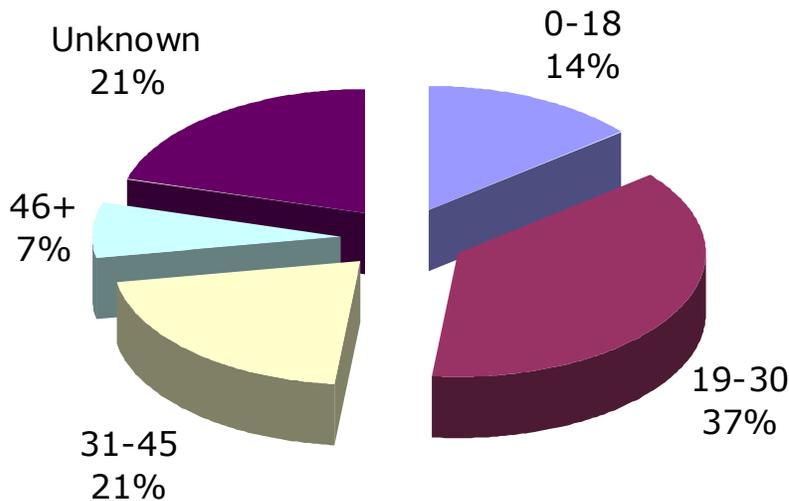
### *Age*

Demographic information is recorded for each woman or girl to the fullest extent possible. In 80% of cases NWAC has been able to identify the age of the woman or girl involved. Figure 2 shows the percentage of women and girls who fall into each of the following age categories:

- 18 years of age or less
- 19 to 30 years of age
- 31 to 44 years of age
- 45 years of age or more
- Age unknown.

These age groupings were defined to correspond with criteria used by governments to establish age of majority or eligibility for programs and services.<sup>5</sup>

**Figure 2: Women's and Girls' Ages (N=520)**



The percentage of cases involving girls and young women is striking. Just over one half (52%) of the women and girls in the database are youth under the age of 30 years. Of this group, 14% were 18 years of age or younger at the time of the incident.

### *Nation*

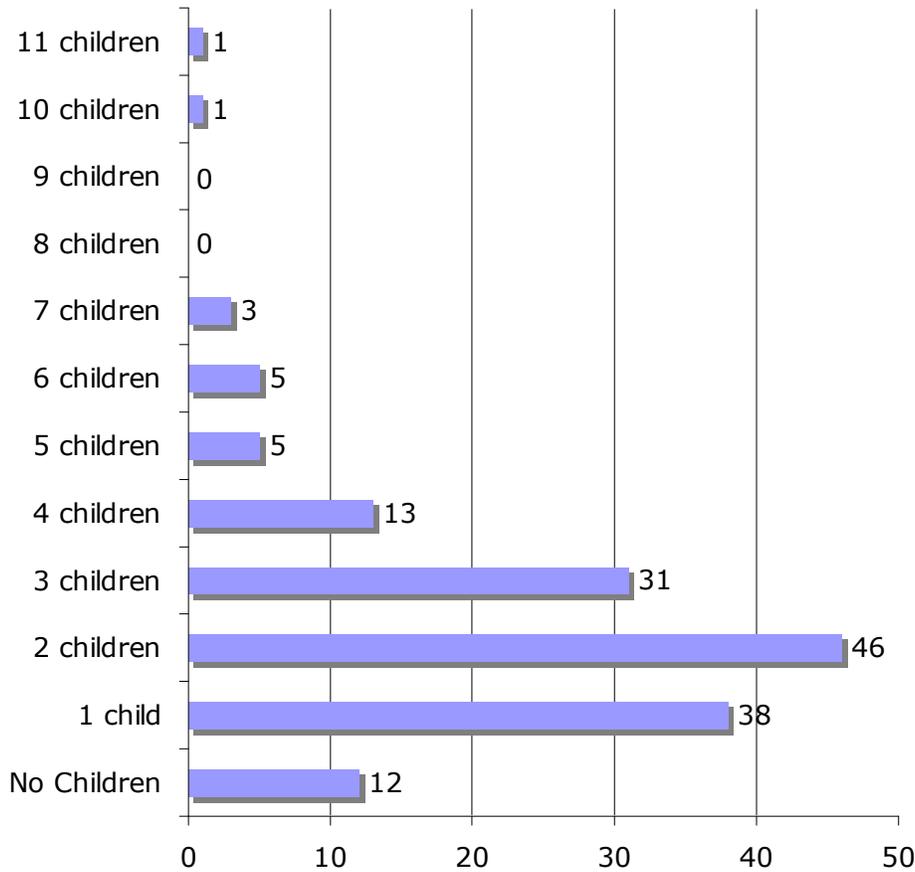
While the information presented in this publication generally refers to 'Aboriginal women and girls', it is important to remember that the term 'Aboriginal' refers to three distinct Indigenous groups in Canada. In recognition of the differences between First Nations, Métis and Inuit peoples, NWAC identifies and acknowledges, where possible, the specific Aboriginal identity of each woman or girl. As of March, 2009, 111 (21%) had been identified as First Nations, 2% as Métis, and 2% as Inuit. A total of 63% (325) of the cases are known to be Aboriginal, but NWAC has been unable to determine whether these women or girls identify specifically as First Nations, Métis or Inuit.

### *Family Size*

NWAC also records information about the number of children a woman has in her family. As this type of information is not well reported in secondary sources such as media reports, family size is known in only a small percentage of cases. Of the 520 women and girls in the database, NWAC has information about family size for 155 women, or about 30% of cases in the database. Of the cases where this information is known, the majority of women were

mothers. The figure below shows the family size of the women in the database, where this information is known.

**Figure 3: Number of Children (N=155)**



*Year of Incident*

NWAC records information about when each case occurred. Of the murder cases identified to date, only 1% occurred prior to 1970, while 5% occurred during the 1970s and 14% occurred during the 1980s. Over one quarter (26%) occurred during the 1990s and over one half (55%) of the cases occurred from 2000 to the present.

The statistics show a similar trend for cases of missing women and girls. Only 3% of the cases in the database date from before 1970. A total of 7% of cases occurred during the 1970s, 16% occurred during the 1980s and 32% occurred during the 1990s. A total of 43% of the cases of missing women and girls occurred during or since 2000.

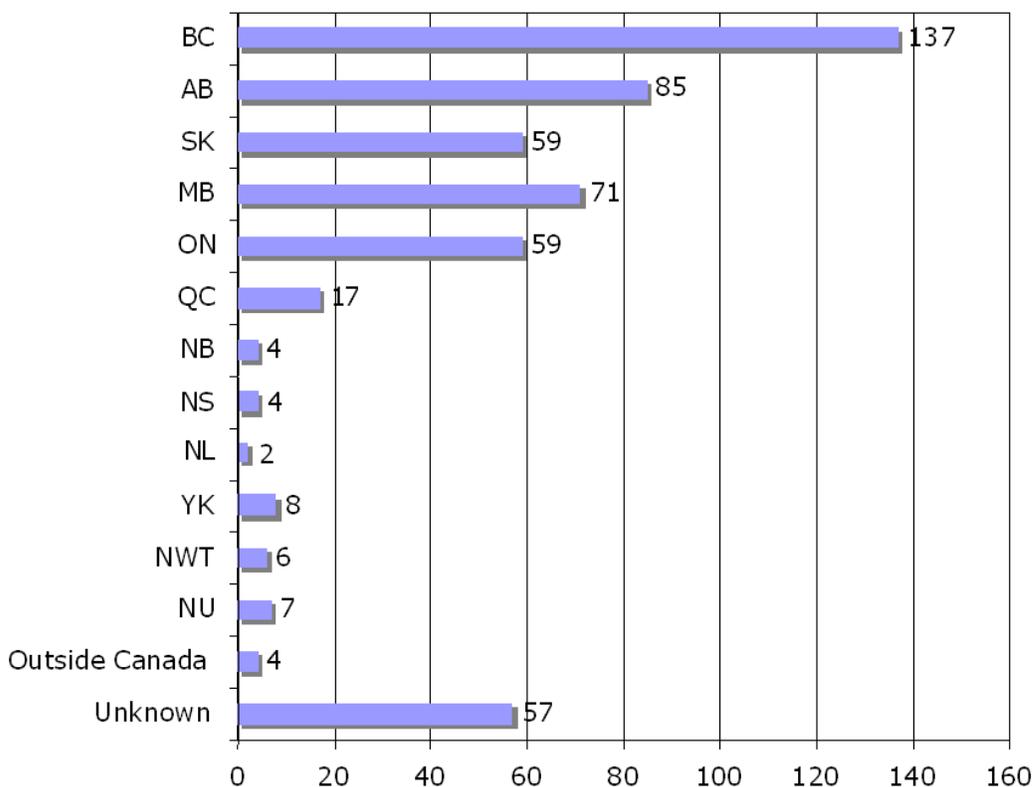


The lower number of cases dating back to earlier decades should not be taken as evidence that violence against Aboriginal women and girls was less prevalent in earlier years. It is difficult to gather information about older cases for several reasons. Discrimination against Aboriginal peoples and greater acceptance of violence against women in previous decades may have resulted in fewer cases being reported. Media records from those years are often available only in hard copy, which makes them difficult to access and search for information. In addition, the memories of witnesses and family members who have information about these cases may be gradually erased by the passage of time, or by the death of these individuals.

*Province of Incident*

The majority of known cases occurred in the western provinces, with British Columbia being the site of the most incidents (137, or 26%). This result is affected by the availability of information on cases occurring in the downtown east side of Vancouver, and those occurring along the Highway of Tears (Highway 16), centering on Prince George. In contrast, very few incidents are recorded in the Atlantic provinces. The figure below shows the distribution of cases across the provinces and territories of Canada.

**Figure 4: Geographic distribution of incidents (N=520)**



## *Clearance Status*

NWAC records information about the police response to murder cases, including whether the case has been ‘cleared’. In the context of this research initiative ‘cleared’ indicates that someone has been charged criminally or that the case has been otherwise resolved. ‘Not cleared’ or ‘open’ indicates that charges have yet to be laid. The data collected to date indicates that 52% (179) of cases have been cleared by charges or by suicide. Disturbingly, 43% (150) of murder cases remain open, that is, no one has been charged in the incident. NWAC is still working to confirm the clearance status of the other 5% (18) of murder cases in the database.

## *Conclusion*

NWAC is continuing to conduct primary and secondary source research to increase the information available about the 520 women and girls whose names are currently in the database. Sadly, NWAC also continues to add new cases as more Aboriginal women and girls disappear or have their lives stolen. For these reasons, NWAC anticipates that our research results will continue to change as new data emerges, amendments to existing cases are made and new cases are identified.

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## **Notes**

<sup>1</sup> The variable ‘case status’ has three values: missing, murdered or suspicious death. It should be noted that in the context of this research initiative, ‘murder’ is used to refer to deaths resulting from homicide or negligence.

<sup>2</sup> For example, a woman’s death may have been caused by negligence on the part of another person, rather than by a direct act of violence.

<sup>3</sup> For example, the police have ruled that a death was due to exposure, while the family believes that another individual has responsibility for the death.

<sup>4</sup> “N” refers to the total number of individuals or cases that are in the group.

<sup>5</sup> The age of majority is set at 19 years in seven Canadian territories and provinces. Federal and provincial governments use the age of 30 years or less to define eligibility for ‘youth’ programs and the age of 45 years or more to identify ‘older workers.’



## Sisters In Spirit Interim Trends and Impacts

The interim research results reported above have been analyzed in the context of the life stories and other data sources. This work has enabled NWAC to identify trends associated with the occurrence of violence against Aboriginal women and girls that results in their disappearance or death. The interim results help us answer the research questions that guide our work. They also allow us to draw conclusions to be carried forward to our analysis of policy options and recommendations to increase the safety and well-being of Aboriginal women and girls.

As described in the Research Framework section of this report, the first research question asks: “What are the circumstances and root causes leading to racialized, sexualized violence against Aboriginal women in Canada?” In responding to this question, NWAC considers the personal experiences and life stories of women and girls who have disappeared or been murdered, as well as the literature concerning violence against Aboriginal women and other relevant sources (such as statistical data).

With over 500 cases confirmed to date NWAC has clearly demonstrated that the number of missing and murdered Aboriginal women and girls in Canada is extremely high. The percentage of missing women in the database has remained consistent over the past two years at about 25% of the total number of cases, despite the regular updates made to the database. This trend of ongoing disappearances is rationalized because for every woman found alive and removed from the database (or found deceased and recoded as a case of murder), the name of another missing woman or girl is added. This trend is also supported by the life stories gathered for specific women and girls. A high proportion of stories shared involve women and girls who are missing or were missing before they were found murdered. Due to the lack of reliable information about the number of women and girls who went missing in earlier decades, we are not yet able to draw conclusions about whether there are more disappearances now than in the past. It is notable, however, that many cases have occurred since 2000. This demonstrates the ongoing severity and urgency of the issue.

Further, NWAC has found the violence under consideration disproportionately affects women who are thirty years of age or less. Both the database and the life stories clearly show a majority of the cases involve young women. This finding indicates the needs of young Aboriginal women and girls must be taken into account when we design public policy and measures to increase their safety. The



evidence indicates young women are active in their communities and may have high rates of mobility as they travel or relocate to attend school, to work at part time or full time employment and to attend social or cultural events. Young women are often still developing their social, educational, employment and family networks, and are establishing themselves as adults in their communities and families. Considering their limited work experience or in-progress education, young women often do not have large financial resources to draw upon, which can make them more likely to use public transport or to rely on alternative transportation methods such as walking or hitchhiking. A lack of resources may also make it more difficult for them to find safe and secure housing. A consequence of this is they may share accommodation or move frequently. These difficulties are compounded if they are also responsible for the care of children.

For cases where information on family size was available, we found the majority of women were mothers. The life stories support this finding, as most of these women also had children. The presence of children is an important trend to consider when formulating policy options and recommendations. It indicates that strategies and measures addressing violence must account for the presence of children, as must the supports and services that target the needs of victims of violence and their families. Active measures are needed to increase the ability of Aboriginal mothers to access safe, affordable and appropriate housing, to provide for their own and their children's personal needs, to promote good health and to encourage developmental activities linked to education and healthy development. Issues associated with income, housing and health of mothers and their children were repeatedly identified both in the database and in the life stories shared with NWAC.

Related to this is the urgent need to support the safety and well-being of infants and children. We are becoming increasingly aware of the connection between child welfare issues and the disappearance or murder of Aboriginal women and girls. These issues take a variety of forms; some witnessed violence as children, while others have experienced abuse and violence themselves. Other families have been involved with child welfare agencies because of issues associated with poverty and lack of resources, supports and services. In addition, family members who assist with child care or child rearing are often not supported by social services or child welfare programs to the same extent that parents are, despite their acting in this capacity. Again, the information shared in the life stories and reported in secondary sources indicates the importance of these issues for Aboriginal women with children.



Finally, NWAC has found that a high proportion of cases are located in western Canada. While this finding is influenced by the distribution of the Aboriginal population in Canada, it also suggests that measures and strategies aimed at increasing the safety of Aboriginal women and girls must take regional differences into account. One factor to be considered are regional differences specific to each province, such as diverse family law provisions related to child support, division of matrimonial property following divorce, restraining orders and custody of dependent children. Other factors to consider include the availability of supports such as legal aid and legal clinics, the nature and provision of victim services and whether police services are provided by local or national forces in each region. The nature or quality of each of these factors may contribute to the likelihood that an individual woman or girl will face a situation of violence, which indicates that they must also be considered when formulating and evaluating policy options.

This leads to a consideration of the second research question guiding our work: “How has the justice system responded to family and community reports of missing and murdered Aboriginal women in Canada? What issues, challenges and gaps exist?” The evidence indicates the majority of families report multiple issues and problems with the justice system’s response to the disappearance or murder of their loved one. NWAC has heard on many occasions the families experienced a lack of responsiveness, disrespect, confusing or incorrect information, poor adherence to policies and protocols and an overall discounting of family information from police service personnel. While a small number of families reported positive interactions with police services, these tended to emphasize the failings that existed in the majority of other cases. Families have provided specific and direct suggestions for improvements in police services, as well as improvements that should be made in victim services and support measures. These have informed NWAC’s position and recommendations for new policies related to access to justice and public safety.

The two final research questions that guide this work shift our thinking towards measures that could positively impact the lives of Aboriginal women and girls. They are: “What changes need to be implemented in order to improve the safety and well-being of Aboriginal women in Canada, particularly related to this issue?” and “How can these changes be implemented in order to reduce or prevent racialized sexualized violence against Aboriginal women, particularly that which results in their disappearance or death?”



These two questions guide our analysis as we move from an exploration of results and trends to the development and evaluation of policy options and the crafting of specific recommendations to move these policy choices forward.



## Sisters In Spirit Recommendations for Future Policy Development

Guided by a human rights perspective, one that privileges and incorporates Aboriginal cultural and ethical values, four key policy areas have been identified to support the Sisters In Spirit initiative. These include:

1. The reduction of violence against Aboriginal women and girls, which results in their disappearance or death.
2. The reduction of poverty experienced by Aboriginal women and girls will increase their safety and security.
3. The reduction of homelessness and increased ability of Aboriginal women to access safe, secure and affordable housing which meets minimum standards of cleanliness and repair.
4. Improved access to justice for Aboriginal women and girls and their families.

Armed with increasing evidence and knowledge generated by our research, NWAC is committed to reducing the marginalization experienced by Aboriginal women and girls in Canada. Through targeted policies and programming, it is our hope that this research will dispel the myths and stereotypes of the missing and murdered Aboriginal women and girls and increase awareness at local, regional, national and international levels to prevent future acts of violence.

The following are detailed opportunities and recommendations to initiate change.

### ***The reduction of violence against Aboriginal women and girls, which results in their disappearance or death.***

The aim of this research is to identify the number of missing and murdered Aboriginal women and girls and understand the extent to which they are faced with violence that has caused their disappearance or death. In conducting this research, the Sisters In Spirit initiative also aims to educate individuals, community leaders, governments and service providers about the risks and realities of violence so they can publicly condemn this violence and work together to reduce it.

Immediate action is required to address root causes of violence, as well as actions that respond to the needs of victims after violence has occurred. It is our belief that the experience of violence against



Aboriginal women is worsened by a lack of understanding that they and their families may experience. The inability to meet the needs of this vulnerable population comes not only from services providers, but justice system professionals and wider Canadian society. To address this issue, society must decrease acceptance of interpersonal violence, including the violence against women that is portrayed in video games, music videos, television shows, movies and other media. Society as a whole must also recognize the social and economic inequalities that exist between men and women, as well as inequalities between Aboriginal women and Aboriginal men, lead to a gap in the options available to women and girls who experience violence.

Recommendations aimed at reducing the level of violence facing Aboriginal women and girls in the short term include the following measures:

All governments (federal, provincial/territorial, municipal, First Nations, Inuit, Métis) publicly condemn the high rates of violence against Aboriginal women, acknowledge their role in addressing this reality and make a commitment to bring this issue to their senior officials for follow up and response, including making public their plans to address this crisis.

Identify resources and champions at senior levels of all governments who are committed to the reduction of violence against Aboriginal women and girls. These individuals must be resourced to provide leadership within their departments, ministries or organizations on an ongoing basis to produce positive change in legislation, policies and procedures affecting Aboriginal women and girls.

NWAC and all levels of government must work collaboratively to review and consolidate existing recommendations from Canadian commissions, inquiries and inquests pertaining to the safety and well being of Aboriginal women from 1982 to the present, with NWAC resourced to participate as a full member in developing a work plan to identify outstanding recommendations and priorities for action.

NWAC and governments jointly establish criteria to evaluate progress including budget expenditures, staffing and service delivery benchmarks and milestones for governmental quarterly reporting to NWAC on the specific actions taken by each department, ministry or agency to address gaps and improve the safety and freedom from violence of Aboriginal women and girls.

NWAC, governments and police collaborate to develop policies and procedures that address the issues of prostitution, trafficking and sexual exploitation of children by focusing on the perpetrators, preventing the



abuse, and ensuring that the victims are not penalized, criminalized or have their personal autonomy restricted.

***The reduction of poverty experienced by Aboriginal women and girls will increase their safety and security.***

The increased risk of violence is often linked to low income and measures of socioeconomic stress. This stress, which is complicated by a complex mix of factors such as colonialization, historical trauma and abuse experienced by Aboriginal peoples, puts Aboriginal women in a particularly vulnerable position. Improving the economic and social well being of Aboriginal women and girls will enhance their safety. Income assistance programs, including student allowances, must meet the real costs of obtaining shelter and other necessities. Improved access to culturally appropriate education and training programs will help Aboriginal women care for themselves and their children. It is of particular concern that eligibility requirements and funding for these programs, co-op placements and work experience programs must be revised to eliminate barriers such as Employment Insurance eligibility requirements. Assistance for women who need extra help to resolve multiple barriers is also necessary, as are all the supports that women need to participate in the economy, such as all-hours child care, micro-loans and comprehensive transportation.

Recommendations aimed at reducing the poverty experienced by Aboriginal women and girls in the short term include the following measures:

Age restrictions associated with training, education and skills development programs and funding must be removed.

Support NWAC to research and evaluate poverty line and market basket measures that underpin income support programs from an Aboriginal women's perspective in order to better understand the factors influencing the poverty experienced by Aboriginal women and girls and to evaluate the effectiveness of income support programs.

***The reduction of homelessness and increased ability of Aboriginal women to access safe, secure and affordable housing which meets minimum standards of cleanliness and repair.***

Issues of housing can be both a cause and a consequence of poverty, violence and other determinants of health. To address this, Aboriginal women must be able to access affordable, appropriate housing in good condition in safe neighbourhoods. Included in this solution must be shelters that are able to accommodate all women, children and youth seeking access to their services, including women who live in rural, northern or remote areas. Shelter services for women in Aboriginal



communities will enable them to maintain their connection with their families, communities and culture and will also help women maintain their eligibility for programs and services through First Nations reserves. Finally, housing support, such as shelters or community-based resources, must provide culturally appropriate programming and supports for women with multiple barriers.

Recommendations aimed at improving Aboriginal women and girls' access to housing and reducing homelessness in the short term include the following measures:

Governments work with NWAC to establish appropriate funding levels for programs and services that meet the needs of Aboriginal girls and youth who are homeless: these must include barrier-free measures and have a geographic distribution that matches the pattern of need. Additional funding to link youth with programs and services that meet their personal needs for income, safety and well being must be available to assist youth to facilitate their exit from supported housing shelter.

Governments, in cooperation with NWAC, must establish adequate, sustained ongoing funding for the provision of sufficient homelessness and housing services for Aboriginal women and girls, ensuring that these are culturally relevant, have a geographic distribution that matches the pattern of need, and include emergency shelters, second stage and third stage transitional housing.

***Improved access to justice for Aboriginal women and girls and their families.***

In the broadest sense, access to justice includes the ability of Aboriginal women and girls to enjoy basic, fundamental standards of human rights. Discriminatory laws, programs, policies and services must be identified and the discrimination removed. Aboriginal women and girls must be protected by the justice system to the fullest extent possible when facing violence. Police training on the issues and concerns of Aboriginal peoples should be emphasized, and common protocols should ensure that there is consistent and responsive assistance to individual women requesting assistance, or to families reporting a missing loved one.

Improved access to justice also means that supports, resources and services are available to families who have lost a family member. Investigations should be conducted in a timely manner, and protocols should allow them to continue over long time periods if necessary. Communication between police services and family members must be timely, respectful and address the needs of the families involved in terms of timing, frequency and content. Family members must also be assisted to provide ongoing care for children who have lost their mothers and be able to manage or handle issues related to the personal property and assets of the missing woman.



Recommendations aimed at improving the access to justice of Aboriginal women and girls and their families in the short term include the following measures:

Implement mandatory comprehensive training for all new recruits and all existing personnel in all police forces on issues, concerns and history of Aboriginal peoples. This training should focus on real issues and outcomes, must address the gap in understanding that exists between officers and Aboriginal peoples because of cultural differences, and not be limited by political or operational considerations.

Police forces develop cooperative relationships with NWAC to establish the basis for future collaborative work on developing information sharing protocols in the medium term.

Governments and police work with NWAC to develop and implement a process for police reporting to NWAC on current missing person protocols or processes in use in jurisdictions across Canada.

Governments work with NWAC and other national organizations to develop a process to broaden Jordan’s Principle to include all jurisdictional issues affecting Aboriginal peoples.

Governments collaborate with NWAC to identify and develop approaches that focus on the needs of families who have female members who are missing or who have been murdered.

Governments (federal, provincial/territorial) work cooperatively with NWAC to conduct an environmental scan of Victims Services programs to identify what is available, what level of usage exists, gaps and the overall effectiveness of these services in meeting the needs of individuals.

Governments (federal, provincial/territorial) collaborate with NWAC to conduct an environmental scan of child welfare systems regarding use of culturally relevant values, beliefs and practices related to child rearing and Eurocentric values ingrained in current child welfare policies and practices, including examining current definitions of neglect and related concepts, and to report this information to NWAC.

Governments provide resources and funds to eliminate the current inequality in funding between First Nations and non-First Nations child welfare systems.

Governments (federal, provincial/territorial) increase funds for support measures linked to child welfare, in-home child supports, poverty-related neglect and other issues to assist Aboriginal families to meet



their needs in the least disruptive way possible to the family, ensuring equity between First Nation and non-First Nations systems.

Governments collaborate with NWAC to conduct a needs assessment to identify the supports and services needed by Aboriginal children and youth who have experienced harms because they are street involved, have witnessed family violence/abuse or experienced sexual exploitation or trafficking.

Governments draw upon the expertise of NWAC and other Aboriginal organizations to identify the number of Aboriginal individuals who have been negatively impacted or traumatized by the child welfare system, and conduct a needs assessment to identify issues and gaps in meeting these needs.

Establish and fund processes and avenues for individuals to connect with court supports, court access and Community Justice protocols, including funding for Aboriginal court workers in all jurisdictions and adequate legal aid for Aboriginal individuals requiring this assistance.

Governments and NWAC work together cooperatively to identify gaps and barriers to the protection of and full enjoyment of human rights by Aboriginal women by reviewing outcomes using a report card model, and evaluate the effectiveness of measures implemented to date to ameliorate these gaps and barriers.

Governments work with NWAC to conduct a culturally relevant gender based analysis of funding formulas and report results to Aboriginal organizations.

### **Emerging policy areas**

With increasing knowledge and understanding of the issues of violence against Aboriginal women and girls, NWAC is finding new areas for further research. One emerging policy issue is the role of acquaintances in influencing Aboriginal women's and girls' perceptions of safety. The criteria Aboriginal women and girls use to assess their level of safety has been identified as an important area for further work. A small number of cases have been recorded involving people who knew each other only slightly or by sight alone. In some instances, the presence of these "acquaintances" may have led the woman or girl involved to feel a false sense of security. Developing new opportunities to raise awareness in this area or increasing community involvement in educating young women and girls about potential harm may help to limit risks of violence or exploitation.



A second emerging policy area concerns child welfare. Further research is needed on the number of perpetrators who were involved with the child welfare system as youth, as well as the ability of child welfare agencies to provide long-term assistance to children of Aboriginal women who have become missing or were murdered, including resources and support to family or community members who are acting as caregivers to these children.

## **Conclusion**

As NWAC continues to identify new information and additional data sources our understanding of the root causes, trends and impacts of violence against Aboriginal women and girls will evolve and strengthen. We anticipate that we will identify additional emerging policy areas over the next year, while deepening our understanding of those developed to date.

NWAC faces certain challenges in framing our comprehensive, holistic policy recommendations for a government audience. The government policy framework (departmentally organized operations, the preference for incremental approaches and the limitations around time frames and funding) impacts the ability to implement solutions to these issues.

Additionally, NWAC faces significant challenges as we work to address multiple, yet interconnected, issues with limited resources and capacity. NWAC strongly promotes, however, the benefits of working collaboratively with all levels of government, other agencies, organizations and individuals to move from policy recommendations to direct action. The ability of governments to address these critical issues is enhanced by their partnerships with NWAC and other Aboriginal organizations which have extensive knowledge, expertise and experience on these issues. The selection of policy options that will most effectively address these issues, as well as identifying collaborative approaches to evaluation and measurement of positive impacts, will also be most successful when undertaken in concert, drawing on the strengths and knowledge of each of the stakeholders involved in this process.



## Thank You and Acknowledgements

NWAC is indebted to the participating families who have lost loved ones to the epidemic of violence facing Aboriginal women and girls. Their courage and generosity in sharing their stories, and the stories of their daughters, mothers and grandmothers is an invaluable contribution. Their vision, strength and commitment have allowed NWAC to move forward with the important work carried out through the Sisters In Spirit initiative.

NWAC acknowledges and thanks the Elders and spiritual leaders who assist the families who have experienced losses, as well as other individuals who work with them to achieve healing and to retain hope for a better future. NWAC also thanks First Nations, Inuit, and Métis communities for their support of women, girls and their families.

NWAC thanks and honours all those individuals who are working to reduce the harms facing all Aboriginal women and girls, including the harms associated with violence, poverty, homelessness and ill health. NWAC also recognizes the contributions of communities and community organizations, and thanks both members and their leadership for their ongoing assistance.

NWAC greatly appreciates the support of the many partnering organizations, departments and ministries who assist NWAC and its staff to conduct the work associated with the Sisters In Spirit initiative.

Together we can continue to provide support to those who most need it: the families who have lost sisters, daughters, mothers and grandmothers.

Miigwetch, Nia:wen, Thank you, Merci.

